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FINLAND IN NAZI GERMANY'S WAR STRATEGY, 1939-1945

By .

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B. A. University of Montana, 1958

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CHAPTER I

THE PRELUDE

The course of Germany's diplomatic contact with Finland during the twentieth century has been shaped largely by German war aims in the eastern Baltic. In time of war, Germany has had to control the Baltic in order to protect the vital shipments of iron ore from Sweden and also to prevent any attack on its northern coast. Finland commands a highly strategic position in the northeast corner of the Baltic. A strictly neutral Finland presented no real threat to Germany during a war, but Finland, with its population of only three and a half million, could hardly hope to remain neutral of her own choice if it became the subject of either German or Russian military strategy.

If Germany chose to conquer Finland or direct its foreign policy as an ally, it could gain many valuable strategic advantages. First of all, Finland could be used as a springboard for an attack on Russia's northern borders. Finland's pre-1939 eastern boundary, beginning at Petsamo in the north and extending south to the northeast corner of Lake Ladoga, shared almost a seven-hundred mile common front with Russia. Control of the Petsamo area could be used for an attack on the sea lanes leading to Murmansk, Russia's northern lifeline;

and the border running along Soviet Karelia offered innumerable points from which an attack could be launched against the Murmansk-Leningrad Railroad. Finland's pre-1939 southern border with Russia crossed the narrow Karelian Isthmus which separates Lake Ladoga from the Gulf of Finland. At this point, Finland lay only twenty miles from Leningrad, placing Russia's second largest city well within the range of modern artillery. The port of Hanko, located on the southwestern coast, was the Finnish harbor nearest to Germany and it could be used as a staging area or a point from which the Gulf of Finland could be closed to enemy shipping. To the west of Turku, Finland's ancient capital, lie the Aaland Islands. These islands control the western approach to Stockholm and also dominate the sea lanes in the Gulf of Bothnia. Finland's geographical position easily lent itself to any German war plans for the domination of the Baltic or the establishment of a second front against Russia.

Unfortunately for Finland, Russia also recognized the strategic importance of its northern neighbor, and in the continuing course of the mutual animosity between Germany and Russia, nearly all of Finland's diplomatic history in this century must be viewed as a struggle to avoid being turned into a Russo-German battlefield. No other nations or groups of nations came even close to approximating the importance that Germany and Russia played in Finland's internal and external policies. So important were Germany and

Russia to Finnish foreign affairs that Wipert von Bluecher, the German Ambassador to Finland from 1939 to 1944, was led to observe that " ... all her Finland's other diplomatic activities are carried on more or less as a sideshow."¹

Finland has long been caught between the eastern expansion of the Western European nations and the western movement of Russia. First under Swedish control from the twelfth century and then as a Russian Grand Duchy under the tsars from 1809, Finland's position in the Baltic caused it to be used as a buffer zone of first one nation and then another.

Germany began to exert its influence on the fate of Finland's political destiny from the beginning of World War I. Since the German involvement in Finland during the last year of World War I closely paralleled the events that led to the Finno-German collaboration of 1941, it is important to have a knowledge of the circumstances that surrounded Finland's fight for independence and the German military intervention that kept the Bolshevik Revolution from absorbing the newly formed state.

During World War I, the German Eastern offensive sapped Russia's strength, and as Russia weakened her control over Finland weakened proportionately. Germany helped Finland

¹U.S. Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series D (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956-1964), III, 553. Hereafter cited as DGFP.

vent some of its animosity against Russia in the early years of the war by accepting over two thousand Finnish volunteers and training them as a unit to form the 27th Jaeger Battalion, which later served as the nucleus of Finland's officer corps during the War of Liberation.

The first Russian Revolution and the demise of the Provisional Government in November of 1917 caused the Finns to begin their first serious move for political sovereignty. With the Bolsheviki in power, the conservative segment of the Finnish Diet felt that it was time to terminate its relationship with Russia. While still afraid that the monarchy might re-establish its rule, the Diet passed a weakly-worded recognition of de facto independence "for the time being" on November 15, 1917. Later, on December 4, a much stronger declaration of independence was read in the Senate. Now for that independence to become a reality, the Russian troops which remained in Finland and the radical Finnish socialists had to be purged from the political scene.²

The German Government now began to negotiate with Lenin for the recognition of Finnish independence. Already committed to a policy of recognizing the independence of national groups within the Empire, Lenin formally declared that he

²J. Hampden Jackson, Finland (New York: MacMillan Co., 1940), 85.

recognized Finland's sovereignty on January 14, 1918.³

Finland's War of Independence had now become a civil war. The Finnish radicals, augmented by the 37,000 Russian troops in Finland, were more than a match for the hastily-assembled forces of the conservative White Guard. The Finnish Red Guard quickly gained control of the industrial centers and the entire southern half of the country. On January 28, the Reds captured Helsinki, and the legitimate government was forced to flee westward to Turku. On the same day that the revolutionaries entered the capital, they proclaimed Finland to be a Socialist Workers' Republic.⁴

One day prior to the Red coup d'etat in Helsinki, the Senate had asked General Carl Gustav Mannerheim to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish forces. Mannerheim was a member of one of the few noble families in Finland, and his military credentials were impressive. The General had spent thirty-seven years in the Russian Imperial Army and had served in the past two Russian wars. He was thoroughly acquainted with both the nobility and the top political leaders of Europe, and his popular prestige in Finland seemed capable of calming much of the conservative

³J. Hampden Jackson, Finland (New York: MacMillan Co., 1940), 87.

⁴Carl Gustav Mannerheim, Memoirs, trans. by Count Eric Lewenhaupt (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1954), 134. Hereafter cited as Mannerheim.

factionalism that existed in the country. Mannerheim agreed to lead the army on the one condition that the Senate would not ask for either German or Swedish intervention.⁵ Marshal Mannerheim believed that the Finns, bolstered by the return of the highly disciplined 27th Jaeger Battalion from Germany, would be enough to defeat the larger but highly disorganized Red Guard. What Mannerheim wanted to avoid at all cost was a close association with a foreign power which might lead Finland into a serious political compromise in the future.⁶

It will never be known if the Finns could have established their own independence, for, unknown to Mannerheim, Senator Pehr Svinhufvud had been negotiating for German aid since December of 1917.⁷ The Germans were not quick to give assistance to the Finns other than releasing the 27th Jaeger Battalion for service in the civil war. The German sympathy was all for Finland, but it was willing to give aid only in so far as it did not detract from their own war effort.

On February 17, the first of the Jaegers landed at Vaasa with war material purchased in Russia by the Germans.⁸ On February 18, the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk broke down, freeing the Germans to aid the Finns and in turn

⁵Mannerheim, 147.

⁶Ibid., 135.

⁷Ibid., 152.

⁸Ibid.

help themselves by adding pressure on the Russians via a second front. The German Government was still uneasy about supplying aid to the Finns, but the military convinced it that German intervention would place additional pressure on Russia and eventually lead to the elimination of any Allied attempt to land at Murmansk.⁹ General Ludendorff stated that the intervention would be purely in the best interests of Germany.¹⁰

Mannerheim, although bitterly disappointed, decided to remain in command so that he could try to restrict the German participation in the war. He demanded of and got a declaration from General Ludendorff stating that the German corps in Finland would be under Mannerheim's command and the Germans would not try to interfere in Finnish domestic affairs.¹¹ Mannerheim also told the British that he would do everything he could to preserve Finnish neutrality, and he firmly stated that the presence of German troops on Finnish soil did not mean that Finland had entered the war as an ally of the Central Powers.¹²

German troops began to arrive on April 3, when the Baltic Division, under the command of Major-General Count

⁹Mannerheim, 159.

¹⁰Ibid., 156.

¹¹Ibid., 156-157.

¹²Ibid., 169.

von der Goltz, landed at Hanko.¹³ The number of the German troops which took part in the campaign has been estimated to have been anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000; whatever their exact number, their presence brought about a rapid destruction of the Red Guard. The rebel government fled from Helsinki the day the first German troops landed, and the Germans, assisted by the Finnish White Guard, were able to recapture the capital on the 18th. By May 16, the Red Guard had been completely crushed and Marshal Mannerheim led a victory parade into Helsinki.

Immediately after the civil war, the Finns decided to choose a German prince to reign as the constitutional monarch of their country. The Finns sought this tie with Germany because they were not yet confident that they would be able to retain their independence by themselves. There still remained the threat that Russia, once its own civil war ended, would again try to incorporate Finland into the USSR. Although German soldiers remained in Finland, there is no indication that Germany attempted to pressure the Finns into making this decision.

In May of 1918, the Finnish Diet, still convinced that Germany was not yet headed for defeat, elected the pro-German Senator Svinhufvud to act as Regent. He immediately began negotiations with Kaiser Wilhelm to see if he would put

¹³Mannerheim, 173.

forward one of his sons to reign in Finland. The Kaiser refused the crown for his sons, but he did suggest his brother-in-law, Prince Frederick Karl of Hesse. On October 19 the Diet elected Prince Frederick king by a vote of seventy-five to twenty-five. Prince Frederick, sensing the imminent German defeat, refused the crown. When the armistice was signed, Svinhufvud resigned, and Marshal Mannerheim, whom the Finns hoped would be more acceptable to the Allies, was chosen to take his place.¹⁴

Germany's defeat in 1918 ended its extensive influence in Finnish affairs. A defeated Germany could no longer offer to Finland the necessary guarantees against Russian aggression. Finland now had to try to steer a neutral course while it tried to gain protection by beginning to associate itself with Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries.

During the post-war years, German relations with Finland continued to be correct, but there were two foreign policy changes made by the Weimar Republic which caused Finland to grow cool toward Berlin. In 1922 when Germany signed the Rappalo Treaty and again in 1926 when the first Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact was signed, Finland began to feel that Germany was beginning to pave the way for a future settlement of the Polish problem. The Finns believed that a Russo-German understanding on Eastern Europe would

¹⁴Mannerheim, 180.

bring Finland into the Russian sphere of influence. In order to escape from being included into the Soviet sphere, Finland continued to draw closer to Great Britain and Sweden, and, at the same time, maintain friendly relations with both Germany and the Soviet Union. Worried by the Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact, Finland did not seek guarantees of protection from Germany; it instead began negotiations in 1927 for a non-aggression treaty with Moscow. After nearly four years of interrupted talks, the pact was signed in January, 1932.¹⁵ This, the Finns believed, would bring the Soviets to believe that Finland was preparing only for the defense of its borders and not searching for any alliances that would lead to an offensive war.

The Finns also knew that friendly gestures toward the Soviet Union would not be enough to maintain their neutrality during a major war. They knew that Russia believed that Finland was not strong enough to prevent a German occupation, and they also realized that the Russians feared that the pro-German sentiment in Finland would help to facilitate any German attempt to conquer the country. The fact that Finland had outlawed the communist party in 1930 and the growth of a Nazi-oriented Patriotic Peoples' Party within Finland did not help to quell the Soviets' doubts.

¹⁵Arnold J. Toynbee, ed., Survey of International Affairs, 1920-1923 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 241.

In 1921, Finland had considered entering into a proposed Baltic bloc consisting of Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and Finland. Upon closer evaluation of this alignment, Finland felt that a treaty with Poland would further involve it in future Russo-German disputes. In the mid-1930's, Finland definitely decided that it would rather be thought of as a Scandinavian neutral rather than a part of any Baltic bloc. Sweden, the major Scandinavian power, was not particularly desirous of entering into any Nordic alliance with Finland. It realized that an alliance with Finland would perhaps lead to a future confrontation with Russia, and in 1936 Sweden sought to establish its complete neutrality by announcing in the League of Nations that it did not wish to enter into any "regional commitments." The Swedes also announced that they would not become involved in any sanctions that the League should happen to apply to any aggressor nation. Under these circumstances, Finland found it impossible to associate itself with Sweden.¹⁶

During the Czechoslovakian crisis of 1938, Sweden began to re-evaluate its policy of complete neutrality. Alarmed by the growing German power, Sweden sought to bolster its defenses without unduly arousing Germany. In August, 1938, Finland and Sweden began talks on a joint guarantee and refortification of the Aaland Islands. The islands were very

¹⁶Mannerheim, 286.

important to both countries. For Sweden, they represented a means to protect its eastern coast and control the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia; for Finland, they now represented a chance to become associated with Sweden. Previously, in 1921, Sweden and Finland had almost gone to war over the islands. The dispute was settled by the League of Nations through a special commission appointed to investigate the status of the islands. By the Aaland Convention of 1921, the League decided that Finland should retain possession of the islands, but they should be demilitarized and guaranteed by the signators of the convention. Now that the fortification of the islands was mutually advantageous to both Finland and Sweden, they began their plans by seeking the approval of the change in the islands' status from the convention's signators. Germany, as one of the guarantors, was expected to offer the loudest objections to the refortification.¹⁷

The development of the Swedo-Finnish talks had caught the Germans off guard. Previously, the German Foreign Office had believed that the Aaland question was one of the major factors which prevented any understanding between Finland and Sweden.¹⁸ The Reich could not afford to take the refortification plans lightly, because much of its iron ore from Sweden came through the Gulf of Bothnia. The Foreign Office

¹⁷Mannerheim, 290.

¹⁸DGFP, V, 555.

notified Ambassador von Bluecher that he was not to reply to any questions on the German position on the proposed refortification; if any inquiries were made, he was to say that he had no instructions on the matter.¹⁹ As the German policy on the Aalands began to take shape, it appeared that the Reich would probably have no objections to the refortification. Germany had no aggressive designs on Sweden, and it felt that the joint occupation of the islands would help to keep them out of Russia's hands.²⁰ The Germans knew that Finnish Foreign Minister Holsti was playing on Sweden's fear of Germany in order to bring about the agreement, but the Foreign Office felt that as long as Sweden's neutrality was respected, the iron ore shipments would continue.²¹ Germany also felt that the Scandinavian countries hoped to maintain the status quo in the North. The Munich Agreement had generated much anti-German spirit in the North, but all of the Scandinavian countries continued to follow a course of strict neutrality.²²

On November 21, 1938, von Bluecher cabled a position paper to the Foreign Office. In this report he stated that, while the Finnish right wing and the officers' corps did not

¹⁹DGFP, V, 596-597.

²⁰Ibid., 597-598.

²¹Ibid., 601.

²²Ibid., 604-607.

fear a German attack, the Social Democrats, who now controlled a majority in the Diet, were aiming the Aaland defenses at Germany, not Russia. He also mentioned that if the northern Aaland Islands which commanded the Kvarken Straits were fortified Germany's iron ore shipments would be seriously endangered. With this warning in mind, the problem was referred to the German High Command (OKH). It decided in January, 1939, that the fortifications should not be objected to even if they were directed at Germany. It was more important for the Reich to know that they could also be used as a defense against Russian designs in the area.²³ OKH believed that the demilitarization should be limited to the southern islands and that German approval should be made contingent upon the receipt of a Swedish guarantee that iron ore shipments would continue in case Germany became involved in a war and an additional guarantee that Sweden would protect these shipments in their transit through the Gulf of Bothnia.²⁴ Although the German Government had now given its tacit approval to the plan, minor reservations were still held on the number of Swedish troops to be stationed on the islands. No objection would be made to Sweden's participation in the construction of the defenses and an almost carte blanche approval would be given to the Finnish involvement,

²³DGFP, V, 610-613.

²⁴Ibid., 613.

but the High Command still wanted to make sure that Sweden would in no way endanger Germany's best interests in the area.²⁵

The German Government had warmed to the Aaland fortification, but the Russians were adamant in their objections. To the Soviet Union, the defenses would not be considered as a deterrent to Nazi aggression; they would be looked upon as a German way station on the road to an attack on Russia. The USSR had communicated a message to the Finnish Foreign Office which claimed that Germany and Finland had negotiated a secret agreement that would place the Aaland fortifications at Germany's disposal in case of war.²⁶ The whole Aaland question, which had begun as an attempt by Finland to associate itself with Sweden and Scandinavian neutrality, had now turned into a shuffling for position in the Baltic by Germany and Russia.

Throughout February of 1939, the German Foreign Office continued to withhold its final approval of the fortification. In March, Lithuania ceded Memel to Germany, and Great Britain announced its guarantee of Poland. As the situation in Europe grew more tense, Finland became even more anxious to begin the fortifications. On April 2, the Foreign Secretary of the German Foreign Office, Baron Ernst von Weizsaecker,

²⁵DGFP, V, 625-626.

²⁶DGFP, VI, 229-230.

announced that Germany would not object to the fortifications, but it did object to Sweden being the only member of the Aaland Convention to participate in the islands' defense. Weizsaecker did hint that this objection would be dropped if Sweden would issue a positive statement that would assure Germany of a continuation of iron ore shipments at a pre-war level in case a major war did begin.²⁷

To further secure Germany's position in the Baltic, Weizsaecker instructed the Reich's ambassadors in Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo, and Copenhagen to broach the question of future non-aggression pacts.²⁸ On May 9, the delegates of the Scandinavian countries met at Oslo and decided that they wanted to continue a policy of strict non-alignment.²⁹ Denmark eventually negotiated a non-aggression pact with Germany, but for the moment the Nordic nations stood as one on this matter. In a separate note to Germany, Finland made it known that it would not be able to enter into a non-aggression agreement. The refusal to negotiate an agreement caused Weizsaecker to view Finland's foreign policy with scorn. Finland had refused the proposed pact by saying that it did not want to become a "pawn" in any political

²⁷DGFP, VI, 284-286.

²⁸Ibid., 359.

²⁹Vaino Tanner, The Winter War (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957), 16. Hereafter cited as Tanner.

combinations concerning the great powers. Weizsaecker was bemused with this stand because Finland continued to retain its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. He felt that Finland would soon have to make the choice of a political alliance with either Germany or the USSR, and he knew that an association with Russia was unthinkable for Finland.

On May 2, the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, cabled his approval of the joint fortification to von Blücher, but he added that he expected Sweden to continue to pursue a course of strict neutrality toward Germany. The German approval of the Swedish participation stemmed in part from the recent Franco-British attempt to begin an encirclement of Germany in order to guarantee Poland. Even if relations between Germany and Sweden were strained, the sanction would help to ease the situation in the Baltic. For Germany, the optimum settlement of the question would have been a unilateral defense of the islands by Finland, but the Finns' desire to become associated with Sweden prevented this solution.³⁰

The Russians had protested against the refortification, and they raised the volume of that protest once they had heard of the German approval. In May the Åland question was brought before the League of Nations, and Russia hoped to intervene there. Although Finland and Sweden had gained the

³⁰DGFP, VI, 402.

consent of all of the signators of the convention, Russia stated that its approval or denial should be considered, as the fortifications directly affected its national security. On May 27, Alexander Maisky, Russia's Ambassador to London, told the League that the fortifications could be used to "bottle up" Russia in the Gulf of Finland. The Ambassador also pointed out that there was no guarantee in the Swedo-Finnish plan which would prevent these fortifications from being used by a hostile third power against the Soviet Union.³¹ Of course, no paper guarantee would ever satisfy the Soviet Union. On May 31, Molotov said that the USSR desired either a continuation of the status quo or an invitation to join in the defense of the islands.³² This was entirely too much for Sweden. It now found itself like Finland, caught between the conflicting aims of Germany and the Soviet Union. In order to avoid this seemingly insolvable dilemma, Sweden told Finland that it was no longer interested in the project.

No sooner had the Aaland question passed momentarily from the scene than the Baltic came into the general problem of peace in Europe once again, this time in respect to the Franco-British attempt to gain a mutual assistance treaty

³¹Jane Degras, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1933-1941 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), III, 331-332. Hereafter cited as SDFP.

³²Mannerheim, 301.

with Russia in order to curb Germany's desire to move into Poland. Both Great Britain and France had been thoroughly alarmed when Hitler began to intimate that he wanted to seek a solution to the Polish problem by annexing Danzig and building a road across the Polish Corridor. By past experience, they knew that once Germany had gained these concessions it would not be long before it tried to eliminate the corridor and perhaps all of Poland as well. Britain had at first tried to show Hitler its intentions by guaranteeing Poland's neutrality on March 31. It now sought to strengthen that guarantee by bringing Russia into a mutual assistance pact.

Russia entered the talks with Great Britain and France with caution and a well-developed concept of what it wanted to gain through the negotiations. Russia knew that if Britain's plan to encircle Germany were to become a concrete political reality it had to have Russian support. The Soviet Union did not intend to sell this support cheap. It wanted three things in exchange for its cooperation: (1) a Franco-British guarantee in case of a German attack on Russia, (2) permission to assist Poland in case of a German attack on that country, and (3) the right to be considered the protector of Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.³³

³³David J. Dallin, Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy, 1939-1942 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1942), 40. Hereafter cited as Dallin.

The first problem which arose in the talks was the Soviet concern with the Franco-British guarantee of mutual assistance to Russia. The British and French had proposed that Russia should come to their aid in the event of a war arising from a Nazi attack on Poland or Rumania. It, however, was not stated in the text of the proposed treaty that Great Britain and France would come to the assistance of Russia in case of a German attack on the Soviet Union. The British contended that this need not be spelled out in the treaty because a German attack on Russia would have to be preceded by an attack on Poland, which then would automatically bring complete military assistance to the Soviet Union. Russia pointed out that it not only felt threatened by Germany on its western borders, but on its northern borders as well. The USSR would not feel secure until the Baltic was also guaranteed.³⁴ The whole problem of the Russian guarantee of Poland was further complicated when the Poles informed the British that they had no desire to have the Soviet Union participate in their defense.

Perhaps the problem that Poland presented could have been cleared up, but the Russians chose to use the British and French desire to gain a guarantee of Poland as a lever to

³⁴E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (eds.), Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Third Series (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1953), VI, 50-51. Hereafter cited as British Documents.

keep the question of a Russian guarantee of the Baltic open. Russia seemingly would not come to terms on Poland until Britain and France came to terms on the Baltic.³⁵

The initial Soviet demands of Franco-British assistance in the Baltic was a frank and realistic expression of the Russian fear of Nazi aggression from the north. Pravda stated the Russian position on the Baltic when it said that even if the Baltic nations continued to be neutral this would not prevent Germany from launching an attack against them. Once the war was on, these tiny nations could not hope to hold their own.³⁶

The Russians then brought forth the proposal that they should guarantee the Baltic in case of either direct or indirect aggression by Germany.³⁷ The question of "indirect aggression" was the point on which the talks with Britain and France ultimately ended.³⁸ The term "indirect aggression" was at best a nebulous expression which pointed to a Soviet take over in the eastern Baltic area. The USSR never did specifically define what they meant by the term, for its vagueness would allow the Russians to interpret it as they pleased once the British and the French agreed to its

³⁵Dallin, 32.

³⁶SDFP, III, 335.

³⁷Dallin, 41-42.

³⁸Ibid., 29.

inclusion in the treaty. The Russians probably would have interpreted "indirect aggression" as the development of any Nazi fifth-column movement in the Baltic States or even any heightening of tensions in Europe which the Soviets believed to indicate an impending war. If Russia were allowed to construe the term's meaning, even the slightest threat would be considered as a casus foederis.

The British and the French were now in a difficult, if not an ironical, position. The Russians would not cooperate in respect to the Polish guarantee without its own guarantee of the Baltic nations. Since the Baltic nations had informed Britain that they did not want to be protected by the Soviet Union, the inclusion of the indirect aggression clause in the treaty, despite the objections of these smaller nations, would simply be condoning one form of aggression in order to prevent another.

The British did make a suggestion which they hoped would satisfy the Russian demand for security and still prevent it from moving its forces into the Baltic States whenever it wished to. The proposal was to insert a clause in the treaty which would call for "immediate consultations" in the event of a threat of "indirect aggression" by Germany. This would perhaps calm the fears of the Baltic nations that Russia would act unilaterally in their defense. Russia refused to negotiate on the basis of the new proposal, because it believed that Britain and France were too far from the Baltic

to offer any immediate assistance and consultations on a course of action would be a disadvantage to Russia if an immediate action were called for.³⁹

The rest of the talks degenerated into a dispute over the semantics of the indirect aggression guarantee. The British went to almost every possible extreme, short of the appeasement that Russia desired, in order to bring about the mutual assistance pact. Perhaps the height of British ingenuity and desperation was contained in Ambassador William Seeds' proposal of June 16. In this proposal to the Russians he said:

If through the action of a European Power, there arises a threat to the Independence or neutrality of another European State, whether bordering on one of the contracting countries or not, which one of the contracting countries considers to constitute a menace to its own security or to the peace of Europe, the three Governments, without prejudice to the action which one or the other of them may take in the interest of its own security or in the execution of an obligation of assistance will, at the request of any one of them, immediately consult together to examine the situation with a view to deciding by common consent, should the necessity arise, upon the application of the mechanism of mutual assistance in conformity with the principles of but independently of the procedure of the League of Nations.⁴⁰

Language or good will could hardly be stretched any further,

³⁹SDFP, III, 352-354.

⁴⁰British Documents, VI, 98.

but still the Soviet Union refused the suggestion.

Hitler was worried about the talks at the Kremlin. He felt that a successful completion of the negotiations would stop the momentum of his foreign policy, and once the original impetus was lost there was a strong possibility that, not only would his aggressive designs on Poland be checked, but he would be forced to begin to make a gradual withdrawal from the gains he had made thus far. For Hitler the continuation of his strategy was directed at Poland, and it seemed that a victory there was contingent upon the outcome of the British attempt to encircle Germany. Both Britain and France had warned Hitler that there would not be another Munich over Poland; the Western Allies were prepared to make a stand and they let the Fuehrer know this in the strongest possible terms.

Germany now began to feel isolated. Japan had recently refused to sign a military alliance with the Reich, and Weizsaecker had told Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador to Berlin, that he was " ... alarmed at Britain's efforts to encircle Germany by the attempt to conclude a treaty at almost any price with Russia."⁴¹ Hitler was now forced to lessen the tension in Danzig and the Polish Corridor while he waited for a chance to strengthen his own position.

⁴¹British Documents, VI, 59.

On May 21, Hitler signed the Mutual Assistance Treaty with Italy, and on the very next day he informed his High Command that "There is no question of sparing Poland and we are left with the decision: To attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity."⁴² On June 7, Hitler tried to throw a stumbling block in the way of the Allied negotiations with the Soviet Union by signing non-aggression pacts with Latvia and Estonia. Finland was also offered a similar agreement but it refused, saying that it felt no need for any pact when relations between the two countries were already peaceful. In reality, Finland was still trying to placate Russian doubts by avoiding any type of treaty with Germany.

When Hitler saw that the Allied negotiations with the USSR were breaking down, he tried to establish a détente with Russia. In late May, Weizsaecker had informed the German Minister to Moscow, Count von Schulenburg, that economic talks with the Soviet Union would be resumed.⁴³ Previously, it had been felt that Russia would only use talks with Germany to pressure the French and the British into an agreement on the Baltic. Weizsaecker had said that the Anglo-Russian pact would be hard to prevent, and a failure

⁴²Allan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 509.

⁴³Raymond James Sontag and James Stuart Beddie (eds.), Nazi-Soviet Relations (New York: Didier, 1948), 15-17. Hereafter cited as Nazi-Soviet Relations.

of Nazi-Soviet talks would only produce "a peal of Tartar laughter."⁴⁴

Dr. Karl Schnurre, the Director of the German Foreign Office's European and Baltic sections of the Commercial Policy Division, was sent to Moscow to reactivate trade negotiations, while Ambassador Schulenburg began to put out feelers for a possible non-aggression pact. The talks with Russia went rapidly through July, and a frenzy of diplomatic activity took place in August as Hitler's projected date for the invasion of Poland neared.

On July 27, Schnurre reported, "Our assumption that the Baltic countries and Finland are in our sphere of influence ... completed for the Soviet Union the feeling of being menaced."⁴⁵ Schnurre continued his report by saying that he had assured the Russians that the German Government was no longer looking in the direction of the Baltic and that the recently-concluded non-aggression pacts with Latvia and Estonia should lend credence to that fact.⁴⁶ Exactly one day before Schnurre filed this report, von Bluecher had assured Finnish Foreign Minister Erkkö that the rumor that Germany was going to give the Baltic States to Russia was "propoganda

⁴⁴Nazi-Soviet Relations, 9.

⁴⁵Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶Ibid., 34.

fairy-tales,"⁴⁷ and two days later Finland was told that this story was being circulated by the British to disrupt the Nazi-Soviet talks.⁴⁸

On August 4, Schulenburg gave Russia its final assurance that there would be no clash of interests in the Baltic,⁴⁹ and on the 5th Hitler told his Foreign Office to make every attempt to close the agreement.⁵⁰ Once the issue of the Baltic was settled, the partition of Poland was agreed upon, and on August 23, the Non-Aggression Pact was signed and placed into effect before it was even formally ratified by either side.

Besides the formal text of the Non-Aggression Pact, which was communicated to the rest of the world, the treaty also contained a secret protocol. Article 1 of this secret protocol placed Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia within the Soviet sphere of influence. Germany had abandoned Finland and the rest of the eastern Baltic in order to proceed with its plans for Poland. Finland had looked upon Germany as a possible ally in a time of crisis, and now Germany had created a crisis for Finland. When the Soviet Union began to implement the provisions of the secret

⁴⁷DGFP, VI, 1002.

⁴⁸Ibid., 1003-1004.

⁴⁹Nazi-Soviet Relations, 39.

⁵⁰Dallin, 38.

protocol, Germany looked the other way. Finland was now summarily abandoned by Germany, and it would have to face the threat of Russian expansion unassisted by a single protective alliance.

CHAPTER II

THE WINTER WAR

The German attitude toward Finland from the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union until the end of the first Russo-Finnish war can best be described as negative. There was pro-Finnish sentiment in Germany just as there were pro-German feelings in Finland, but the Secret Protocol of the Nazi-Soviet Pact had placed Finland and the Baltic Nations¹ within the Soviet sphere of influence. Germany knew that the pact had freed the Soviet Union to carry out its designs in this area, but the Reich condoned the Soviet aggression because it felt that it was politically and militarily expendable for the moment. These countries were to be looked upon as pieces of real estate to be bartered or exchanged for other territories considered to be of greater value to the expansion of the Reich.

In August of 1939, Hitler had focused his attention on Poland. It was to the East that Lebensraum was to be found, and Poland was to be the next target for Hitler's Master Strategy. The Fuehrer hoped to partition Poland a la Munich

¹The Soviet Union thought of Finland as being part of the Baltic Bloc, while Finland thought of itself as being a Scandinavian country.

but he did not discount a military take-over. As long as the Soviet Union remained uncommitted to any of the power blocs then forming, Hitler knew that the Allies would attempt to reach an accord with Russia and complete their plan of encircling Germany. The Soviet Union's price for its cooperation in the Allied plan to curtail Hitler's advance had been freedom of action in the eastern Baltic, a price that the Allies had been unwilling to pay. Hitler, however, was willing to meet the Soviet demands, and by meeting them he gained his own freedom of initiative to continue against Poland.

The decision to abandon Finland to the USSR did present two major tactical problems to Germany. A Soviet occupation of Finland would cut off valuable Finnish trade and give the Soviets control of the eastern shores of the Baltic and the Gulf of Bothnia. The control of the Gulf of Bothnia in turn would possibly lead to Russian influence in northern Sweden and this would represent a possible threat to the all-important shipments of Swedish iron ore from this area. These disadvantages, however, lay in the future. Hitler was willing to risk them because he believed that it was imperative to continue the momentum of his present policy in the East. This momentum seemingly could only be prolonged by an immediate solution to the Polish question.

It did not take the Soviet Union long to take advantage of the new freedom of action it had gained in the Baltic and

Poland. On September 17, only two and one half weeks after the Nazis launched their offensive against Poland, the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations with Warsaw² and began to occupy the territory which had been reserved for it by Article 2 of the Non-Aggression Pact's Secret Protocol.³ On September 28, A Mutual Assistance Treaty was signed with Estonia,⁴ and an identical agreement was negotiated with Latvia on October 5.⁵ The treaties were really not negotiated; they were forced upon the countries. The Soviet Union hoped to complete the expansion of its buffer zone against Germany while the Reich was still occupied with the Allies. Since the Non-Aggression Pact prohibited the use of Germany as the country against which the treaties were to be directed, the Soviet Union said that it was trying to protect these nations from the threat of British aggression. Lithuania was treated with a little more diplomatic respect since it shared no common borders with the USSR and because Germany had territorial interests in Memeland.⁶ A treaty, which called for

²SDFP, III, 374-376.

³Ibid., 359-361.

⁴Dallin, 83-85.

⁵Albert N. Tarulis, Soviet Policy Toward the Baltic States, 1918-1940 (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 155.

⁶Germany had earlier acquired the port of Memel, which lay adjacent to East Prussia.

"mutual consultations" in the event of direct or implied aggression against Lithuania, was signed on October 10.⁷ The wording of these three treaties may have been slightly different, but the intent of each was quite similar. By June of 1940, all three countries had been absorbed by the Soviet Union in order to "protect" them from the Allies.

Soviet plans to gain security along its northern borders began long before the autumn of 1939. As early as April 19, 1938, Boris Jartsev, the Second Secretary to the Soviet Legation in Helsinki, began secret talks with Foreign Minister Rudolph Holsti.⁸ Jartsev informed Holsti that, while the Soviet Union respected Finland's territorial sovereignty, it was convinced that Germany was planning an attack on Russia through Finland. If this happened, the USSR would be forced to advance and meet the attack on Finnish soil. If Finland would guarantee to resist any German attack, the Soviet Union would aid it with both men and material. There were other proposals of a very vague nature, but the main tenor of the talks was that Finland should act in concert with the USSR in the defense of Russia's northern borders. Finland, which had no interest in the proposal, could not

⁷Soviet Documents, III, 380-382.

⁸The talks were so secret that only a few Finns knew that they were being conducted. Not even President Kallio was informed about them. The Russian secrecy was so strict that the Russian Ambassador to Helsinki and Litvinov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, remained ignorant of them.

afford to dismiss the suggestion immediately. The talks continued in secrecy at infrequent intervals for the rest of the year, but no decisions were reached on the matter.⁹

In August of 1939, when tensions in Europe were being heightened by talk of a Nazi offensive against Poland, the Soviet Union felt that it was necessary to increase its pressure on Finland in order to come to an agreement on the northern borders. Jartsev announced that his government wanted: (1) a written guarantee that Finland would attempt to repel any German invasion and accept Soviet aid in its effort to do so, (2) a thirty-year lease on the island of Hogland in the Gulf of Finland, and (3) a bilateral fortification of the Aaland Islands.¹⁰

All of these Soviet requests were clearly an attempt to protect Russia from a possible German attack. The Aaland Islands were important to Russia in that, by sharing in their defense, the Soviet Union would be in a position to sever the main line of sea communications between Finland and Germany, and, at the same time, enable the Russians to block the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia and thereby keep Swedish iron ore from reaching Germany. The naval station at Hogland would allow the Soviet Baltic Fleet to seal off the entry to

⁹Max Jacobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 7-12.

¹⁰Mannerheim, 294.

the Gulf of Finland and protect Leningrad and the naval base at Kronstadt.

Finland's adamant stand against the proposals was severely complicated by the new Nazi-Soviet accord. The Finnish Foreign Office had always hoped that the natural animosity between Germany and the Soviet Union would act as a counterbalance to prevent an attack on Finland by either of the two powers.¹¹

Instead of softening their demands in order to reach a compromise with Finland, the Soviets' terms became harsher as the talks continued. Now, instead of asking for the lease of territory which lay on the outer periphery of Finland, Molotov, who, with Stalin, had replaced Maxim Litvinov as the director of Soviet foreign policy, demanded that the Finns give Russia a thirty-year lease on the port of Hanko and rectify the border along the Karelian Isthmus.¹² Hanko was the major Finnish port on the Baltic, and the Soviets believed that it was there that the Germans would try to make an entrance into Finland. In 1939, the Karelian border was only twenty miles from Leningrad. Molotov wanted to move it farther north to take the city out of artillery range and

¹¹Mannerheim, 295.

¹²Mannerheim, 311.

also to destroy the effectiveness of the Mannerheim Line.¹³

When the Finns noticed the calm assurance of the Soviets at the conference table, they quickly began to suspect that the USSR and Germany had come to an agreement on the disposal of Finland. The Finnish Foreign Office immediately began to ask Berlin if there were more to the Non-Aggression Pact than what had already been published.

Three days after the signing of the Pact, Foreign Minister Erkko asked the German Ambassador if any agreement concerning Finland had been made with the Soviet Union. Von Bluecher informed Erkko that the Pact contained no secret protocol, and the Non-Aggression Treaty was beneficial to Finland in that it removed the Baltic from the war.¹⁴ Arne Wuorimaa, Finland's Ambassador to Germany, was given a similar explanation in Berlin.¹⁵ To prevent any diplomatic indiscretions by his staff, Ribbentrop cabled the legations in Finland, Latvia, and Estonia to tell them not to mention anything about any new spheres of influence.¹⁶

¹³The Mannerheim Line was Finland's major line of defense against the Soviet Union. It was not composed of man-made fortifications comparable to the Maginot or Siegfried Lines, and its main defensive advantages lay in the swamps and marshes of the area, which made a mechanized assault against the area all but impossible.

¹⁴DGFP, VII, 338.

¹⁵Ibid., 543-545.

¹⁶DGFP, VIII, 238.

Germany's position was clear: it had non-aggression pacts with the Baltic Nations, and it had declared its intent to respect the neutrality of the Scandinavian countries, but the Reich was still willing to allow Russia to proceed unobstructed in its plans for the North.

Not all members of the German Foreign Office viewed this new diplomatic tack with calm assurance. Ambassador Bluecher¹⁷ tried desperately to keep Germany from ignoring Finland's fate.¹⁸ In September, as Finland sought to mitigate the Soviet demands and gain approval of its plans for a bilateral fortification of the Aaland Islands with Sweden, Bluecher asked his Foreign Office to intercede on Finland's behalf in its talks with the Soviet Union.¹⁹ This was the first, but not the last time he would try to involve Germany in the talks. Weizsaecker, the Foreign Office's Foreign Secretary, replied to Bluecher's request with a firm no. This suggested course of action would only involve Germany in unnecessary disputes with the Soviet Union and make it appear as if the Reich was not respecting the spirit of the Secret Protocol.²⁰ At the end of September, Bluecher attempted to

¹⁷Wipert von Bluecher's diplomatic career extended well back into the days of the Weimar Republic. He was not overly sympathetic with the Nazis, and, since his assignment to Finland, he had gained a deep respect for his host nation.

¹⁸Jacobson, 25.

¹⁹DGFP, VIII, 106-107.

²⁰Ibid., 107.

assess Finland's new position as a result of the Nazi-Soviet accord. He stated that Finland's economy had been drastically altered now that the war had all but cut it off from Great Britain. He also felt that Germany's reserved attitude toward Finland had caused a serious deterioration in the ties between the two nations. The Finns believed that Germany's decision to make friends with the Soviet Union had been the primary cause of its current dilemma with Russia. Bluecher went on in order to revive German interest in Finland by saying, "We should utilize ... the economic potentials of the country and develop our position so that it will be maintained even after the war."²¹ In view of the fact that this assessment and suggestion was made just one day prior to the signing of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty, it did little to cause the German Foreign Office to develop a sympathetic attitude toward Finland.

The Finnish Foreign Office also continued in its efforts to establish a détente with Germany. Ambassador Wuorimaa told Weizsaecker that the Soviet Union was beginning to change the entire balance of power in the Baltic. He hinted that Russia was rapidly trying to gain strategic positions in Finland which could only be directed against Germany. Wuorimaa reminded Weizsaecker that Finland had declared its neutrality in the war and had begun to try to eliminate

²¹DGFP, VIII, 151-154.

pro-British sentiment in the country; in return for these gestures of good will, he felt that Germany should ask the Soviet Union to lessen its demands on Finland. Weizsaecker answered by chiding the ambassador over the fact that Finland had refused Germany's previous offer of a friendship treaty and said that the Reich was in no position to intervene in the Russo-Finnish conversations.²²

The negotiations were resumed on October 12, in Moscow. Two days before they began, Bluecher again tried to portray the seriousness of the situation to the Foreign Office in Berlin. The Finns had begun a partial mobilization of their army in order to ready themselves for the Soviet threats that they knew would accompany the Russian demands at the conference table. Bluecher reported that anti-German sentiment was on the rise in Finland and that there had been incidents against the local Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche. He thought that the Soviet's incursion into Finland would cause "grave consequences" and hoped that Germany could offer some aid without altering its Baltic policy.²³ Ribbentrop realized that even the slightest German assistance to Finland would violate the spirit of the Non-Aggression Pact and seriously complicate the continuance of friendly Russo-German relations. The German Foreign Minister sternly ordered Bluecher

²²Nazi-Soviet Relations, 121-122.

²³Ibid., 123; and DGFP, VIII, 251.

to follow the prescribed policy of neutrality and avoid any personal speculation on the future course of events in Finland. Furthermore, Bluecher was ordered to discourage ex-President Svinhufvud from making a trip to Berlin to ask for assistance. Svinhufvud's pro-German sentiments were well known and the Reich wished to avoid any embarrassment that his presence in Berlin would cause while the critical talks were progressing in Moscow. Ribbentrop ended his communique with the phrase that had become his guideline to the situation: " ... Germany is not concerned with Russo-Finnish problems."²⁴

When the Russo-Finnish talks were resumed in Moscow on October 12, Juho Paasikivi, the Finnish Ambassador to Sweden, headed Finland's negotiations' team. He was also accompanied by Väino Tanner, then the Finnish Minister of Economics, and Colonel Paasonen from Marshal Mannerheim's staff. Molotov and Stalin directed the Soviet diplomacy. The fact that these two Soviet leaders maintained exclusive control of the Russian negotiations indicates the extreme seriousness of the talks. Molotov informed the Finns that two questions had to be settled at the conferences. The Soviet Union had to secure the safety of Leningrad and be completely satisfied that Finland would maintain firm, friendly relations with the USSR. If these two points could not be settled in

²⁴Mannerheim, 309-310.

Moscow, the Soviet Union would be forced to use "other methods" to achieve these ends.²⁵

He continued to amplify his demands by stating that Leningrad was to be protected through the rectification of the Karelian border, and "firm and friendly" relations were to be insured by a thirty-year lease on Hanko and the Soviet acquisition of five small islands in the Gulf of Finland.²⁶ The Finns were willing to discuss the islands and the border, but they refused to consider Hanko. Hanko was very important to the Finnish economy, and a Russian presence there would seriously compromise the nation's defense system. Since the Soviet acquisition of the islands in the Gulf of Finland would effectively block the entrance to Leningrad, the Finns believed that Russia was only trying to gain a foothold in Finland in order to begin a more extensive program of conquest.²⁷ As the talks drew to a close, Paasikivi optimistically conjectured that Finland wanted to remain at peace with the rest of the world and remain apart from all incidents which might bring it into a war. Stalin answered this with an ominous, "That's impossible."²⁸

The German position of neutrality toward the

²⁵Soviet Documents, III, 382-384.

²⁶Tanner, 29.

²⁷Ibid., 34.

²⁸Ibid., 30.

negotiations took an even more definite form after the Moscow talks had ended in failure. On October 15 and 16, Sven Hedin, a Swedish industrialist and explorer, had talks with Hitler and Goering on the future fate of the Northern neutrals. Reichsmarshal Goering informed Hedin that " ... Finland will be attached to Russia." The Fuehrer told him that Germany would continue its present policy of neutrality towards the North, and he believed that the Soviet demands on Finland were justifiable. Hitler seemed piqued over the anti-Nazi feeling in the North, and he felt that Finland had not been properly appreciative of the assistance that Germany had given it in 1918.²⁹

The third and last round of the Russo-Finnish talks began again in Moscow on October 23. The negotiations followed the same obstinate pattern that the other two meetings had taken. Molotov and Stalin continued to press for Hanko, while Finland had determined to retain the port at any cost.³⁰ The talks were once again terminated at this point and tentatively scheduled to resume once more in November. When the Finnish diplomats made their farewells to Molotov and Stalin, the two communist leaders appeared to be cheerful, and the Finns fully expected that the talks

²⁹Tanner, 82-83.

³⁰Ibid., 52.

would not be ended.³¹

Even the official German news agency, DNB, was printing stories which intimated that the talks would resume in a few days.³² This, however, did not mean that the Reich was trying to steer the negotiations to a peaceful conclusion. The Foreign Office remained as aloof as ever on the matter. The only other indication that the German Government was expecting a peaceful settlement came in an unofficial conversation between Väinö Tanner and Ambassador von Schulenburg at a dinner in Moscow. Schulenburg informed Tanner that his Foreign Office presumed that there would be a settlement and he expected Finland eventually to lease Hanko.³³

At this point in the war, Germany could still afford to ignore Finland. The country represented no outstanding economic or military significance at the moment. The only German concern was the possibility of Sweden becoming involved in the dispute between Russia and Finland. Finland had continued to try to rekindle Sweden's interest in a bilateral defense of the Aalands throughout all of 1939. The popular sentiment in Sweden for such a cooperation was high, but the Swedish Government was distinctly cautious. In fact, the Finns had but one strong ally in the Swedish cabinet who

³¹Tanner, 74.

³²Ibid., 77.

³³Ibid., 71.

continued to promote the idea. Swedish Foreign Minister Rickard Sandler believed that the Soviet Union had designs on Sweden as well as Finland, and he felt that a Russian occupation of the Aalands represented a direct threat to his country's security.³⁴ Sandler continued to prompt the Swedish Government to join Finland in the Aaland fortification, but his attempts were not successful. He was eventually relieved of his post for his strong stand on the issue.³⁵

Sweden was not only afraid of Russia's reaction to an alliance with Finland, but it was also forced to measure the German views on the matter. Sweden was the main source of Germany's supply of iron ore, and if it were drawn into a Russo-Finnish war as an active combatant, Germany's relationship with Sweden would be seriously complicated in two ways. First of all, the Soviet Union would try to blockade the Gulf of Bothnia³⁶ and this would force Germany to face the decision of whether or not it should respect the Soviet move. Secondly, the richest of the Swedish iron fields were within easy reach of the Soviet Karelia. These fields would

³⁴Scandinavia Between East and West, ed. by Heinrich Friis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 277.

³⁵Tanner, 50.

³⁶The Gulf of Bothnia was only used for the shipment of iron ore to Germany in the spring, summer, and fall. The Gulf froze over in late November, and remained ice bound until April.

be very vulnerable to a Soviet attack and difficult to defend if the German army attempted to protect them. If Sweden did become involved in a war with Russia, the only other way that the Reich could protect its interests in the North would be to ally itself with the Soviet Union. This would be a difficult decision at a time when the war in the West had not yet been decided.

Sweden, however, did not make Germany face any of these theoretical problems. Prime Minister Hansson, on October 27, informed the Finnish Government that Sweden did not want to consider the bilateral fortification plans, as it thought that this scheme would involve the country in a war with the Soviet Union.³⁷ Finland's isolation was now nearly complete, and Germany's immediate concern in the North was relieved for the moment.

In November, the Soviet Union decided that nothing could be settled through a continuation of the talks with Finland. Instead of resuming the negotiations, it began to apply the military pressure it had threatened in the past.³⁸ Later in the month, the USSR requested that the Finns withdraw the troops which were stationed along the Karelian

³⁷Tanner, 47-48.

³⁸It is difficult to document the Russian decision to begin the war. It must have been considered as early as October, because, at that time, Molotov had tried to get Arvo Tuominen, a Finnish radical, to come from Sweden to Moscow in order to discuss the details of forming a puppet Finnish Republic. Tuominen refused to go and Kuusinen was chosen instead.

border.³⁹ Finland moved the men back a few kilometers in order to avoid any incidents which might provoke a Russian attack.⁴⁰ This Finnish discretion was not enough. The Soviet Union claimed that a Finnish battery had fired on Russian soldiers stationed near the village of Mainila on November 26.⁴¹ The Soviets refused to listen to Finnish appeals on the so-called "Mainila Shots" and the Finnish-Russian Non-Aggression Pact was denounced in Moscow on the 28th.⁴² On the morning of the 30th, the Russians launched a surprise air attack on Helsinki and the Winter War was begun.⁴³

On December 1, the Soviet Union constructed and recognized a puppet Democratic Peoples' Government of the Finnish Republic in the city of Terijoki. O. W. Kuusinen, a Finnish radical, who had fought for the communists in the War of Liberation in 1918, was chosen to head the government. By December 3, the Soviets had "negotiated" a treaty with the Kuusinen government which gave Russia all the territory that it had demanded earlier.⁴⁴

³⁹Soviet Documents, III, 401.

⁴⁰Mannerheim, 315.

⁴¹Soviet Documents, III, 401.

⁴²Ibid., 402.

⁴³Ibid., 402-3.

⁴⁴Ibid., 406-409; and Mannerheim, 323.

During the opening stages of the war, Finland was anxious to seek peace. Risto Ryti, a banker, was chosen to head a new Finnish Government on December 1, and he tried to resume negotiations with the Soviet Union. Molotov, however, refused to negotiate with the "Ryti-Tanner Government," saying that he would recognize only the settlement which had been made by the Kuusinen regime in Terijoki.⁴⁵

The Soviets desired and expected a speedy victory. A quick end to the hostilities would eliminate the possibility of other nations coming to the aid of Finland, preserve Soviet military strength, and allow Russia to concentrate its attention on the developments that were taking place in the Balkans. At first, only troops from the Leningrad garrison were committed to the war, but it soon became apparent that other units would be needed. What victories that were won in December were all Finnish ones.⁴⁶

Germany did nothing to alter its stand of complete indifference to Finland once the war had begun. If anything, the Reich's Foreign Office developed an even more decided pro-Soviet line in order to allay any possible Russian suspicions. On December 2, Weizsaecker cabled all German missions to inform them that they were to reject any anti-Russian notes that they might be asked to receive. The

⁴⁵Soviet Documents, III, 411.

⁴⁶Mannerheim, 327-346, passim.

German ministers were to say that the conflict should be thought of as a natural rectification of Soviet borders.⁴⁷

At this point in the conflict, the Reich could look upon the Winter War as an advantage to its overall military strategy. If the war were a prolonged one, it would keep the Soviets busy in the North while Germany strengthened its position in the Balkans. At the same time, it would help to exhaust Soviet military strength and make Russia more dependent on Germany. The German attitude toward the war would change only after the Allies indicated that they desired to send troops to Finland by way of Norway and Sweden.

As Finland's army held back the Soviet offenses, the Finnish Government attempted to gain outside aid and seek a negotiated peace. The early Finnish victories were encouraging, but the government realized that the army could not survive a long war of attrition without help. On December 4, Rudolph Holsti asked the League of Nations to condemn the Russian Aggression and send aid to Finland. The League did, in its last official act, condemn the USSR, but this organization was now so weak that the mandate received little support.⁴⁸ Finland had also requested that Germany and Sweden use their good offices in order to approach the Soviets for possible terms for a negotiated settlement.

⁴⁷Nazi-Soviet Relations, 127.

⁴⁸Tanner, 106-108.

Germany replied with its now characteristic no, and the Soviet Union still continued to assert that it would not negotiate with a government it no longer recognized.⁴⁹

Virtually every nation in the world, with the notable exception of Germany, voiced its support of the Finnish cause. As this sympathy began to turn into support in the form of men and matèriel, the Reich was forced to begin to reevaluate its attitude. Hitler believed that the Scandinavian countries should be kept out of the war until the campaign in the West had been completed. If France and Great Britain were defeated, there would then be no need to extend the war into the North. Now, with volunteers crossing Norway and Sweden to Finland, the war could spread to the North before the Fuehrer was ready for it.⁵⁰

Aid from nations which were as yet neutral in the war did make its way to Finland. By the end of the war, over 12,000 men had gone to Finland.⁵¹ Even Italy, Germany's closest ally, did its best to send support. Some of this Italian aid did gain transit through Germany and caused the Soviet Union to question German neutrality.

On December 9, von Schulenburg cabled his Foreign Office

⁴⁹DGFP, VIII, 486-488; and Tanner, 106-108.

⁵⁰Earl F. Ziemke, The German Northern Theater of Operations, 1940-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army Pamphlet, 1959), 7-10.

⁵¹Mannerheim, 359.

to report that Molotov was furious over reports that Italy had sent fifty pursuit planes to Finland by German rail.⁵² Ribbentrop explained the matter by saying that Italy had received the transit rights before the Winter War had begun and that consent for the shipment had been withdrawn as soon as the war started. Some of the planes may have gotten through, but there was no cause for alarm.⁵³ Tass did continue to publish reports of German arms shipments, but Molotov ended this dispute, but not his suspicions, when he informed Ambassador Schulenburg that the matter had been explained to his satisfaction.⁵⁴ Italy was able to supply Finland with thirty fighter planes during the Winter War, but they were sent through Norway and Sweden.⁵⁵

Germany did seem to be sincere in its attempt to remain neutral. Admiral Raeder recommended that no arms be sent to Finland, and Germany was even hesitant to fulfill its arms commitments to Sweden lest these guns find their way to the Finns.⁵⁶ The number of unarmed volunteers which had begun to pass through Norway and Sweden did not unduly alarm the

⁵²DGFP, VIII, 506-507.

⁵³Ibid., 506-509, 514, 521.

⁵⁴Ibid., 513-514; and Nazi-Soviet Relations, 130.

⁵⁵Mannerheim, 377.

⁵⁶Fuehrer Conferences on Matters Dealing with the German Navy (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 55. Hereafter cited as Fuehrer Conferences. DGFP, VIII, 520.

Germans. As early as December 6, Reichsmarshal Goering told Count Rosen, the Swedish Ambassador to Berlin, that Germany would not object to Swedish volunteers going to Finland, nor would it consider the passage of volunteers from neutral countries as a casus belli.⁵⁷ The possibility of an Allied intervention through Scandinavia was an entirely different matter. Germany indicated in a vague manner that the Reich was not interested in seeing Sweden commit itself in the Winter War past the limits which had been prescribed by Goering.

For the Allies, the early months of World War II had produced nothing but exasperation and frustration. They had not been able to stop the Wehrmacht from conquering Poland, and now that the German army was assembling its might on the French borders, they had no cause for any optimism. At the time, it seemed impossible for the French and British to launch an offensive against Germany, so they were forced to wait and try to prepare for the next German move in the West. The Winter War began to focus their attention to the North. If a front in Scandinavia could be opened with support from Norway and Sweden, the whole complexion of the war might be changed.

On December 11, Winston Churchill, who had already proposed plans to mine Norwegian territorial waters and the

⁵⁷Tanner, 160.

Rhine River, brought up the possibility of extending the war to the North. The proposal was considered in the Foreign Office, and it was decided that the venture would be too risky. The plan might draw Russia into the war on Germany's side, and there was no assurance that the Norwegians and Swedes would assist the plan.⁵⁸

At a meeting of the Allied Supreme War Council, French Premier Daladier announced that France was most anxious to aid Finland.⁵⁹ The French were by now frenetic in their desire to see the war removed from their borders. Members of the French political right and left were sympathetic to Finland's cause. The French animosity toward Russia was high, because it was felt that the Soviet Union had betrayed France by signing the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany after it had signed a similar agreement with France.⁶⁰ The French hoped to parlay the Scandinavian sympathy for Finland into a durable coalition which would allow the war to be shifted from the West to the North. France realized the strategic importance of the Swedish iron ore, but it was mainly

⁵⁸Sir Llewellyn Woodward, British Foreign Policy in the Second World War (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), 19.

⁵⁹Paul Reynaud, In The Thick Of The Fight, trans. by James D. Lambert (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 254.

⁶⁰Pertinax [Andre Geraud], The Gravediggers of France (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1944), 141.

interested in relieving some of the pressures at home.⁶¹

The War Council decided to implement its new plans by sending a démarche to Norway and Sweden in order to gain transit rights for an Allied passage through Scandinavia. The Allies hoped to land at Narvik and Lulea, the Norwegian ports from which Germany received most of its iron ore, and then advance on to Finland after they had secured the iron fields in northern Sweden.⁶²

The control of the Norwegian coast was starting to become a top priority for the British. Up to this time, Britain had not been able to halt the German shipments of Swedish ore which were coming from ports in western Norway. The Germans freighted their shipments through the Norwegian Leeds, and their ships stayed well within the fjord-protected territorial waters of Norway.⁶³ Britain was equally sympathetic with Finland, but it looked upon the proposed intervention in the Winter War primarily as a chance to curtail Germany's iron ore shipments. Churchill, then Britain's First Lord of the British Admiralty, was his country's chief proponent of extending the war to the North. He was willing to risk war with the Soviet Union, because he felt that Russia was

⁶¹Pertinax /Andre Giraud/, The Gravediggers of France (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1944), 142-144.

⁶²W. N. Medlicott, The Economic Blockade, Vol. I (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), 45.

⁶³Captain Donald Macintyre, Narvik (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1959), 55.

already a German ally in everything but name.⁶⁴

The subject of the Swedish ore became even more important when it was learned from Fritz Thyssen, a former German industrialist then residing in France, that he believed that the war would be won by the side that could control the ore.⁶⁵ The Allies then looked upon aid to Finland as a secondary effort to be completed when the primary targets in Norway and Sweden had been secured. The most immediate disadvantage to the Allied plans in Scandinavia was the fact that transit rights across Norway and Sweden would be hard to obtain. These two countries wished to remain neutral, and they realized that the granting of passage rights would be a casus belli for Germany. Anti-German sentiment was high in Norway and Sweden, but their desire to remain neutral seemed even greater.

The war in Finland was now temporarily removed from the spotlight. However, since the Allies were counting on a continuation of this struggle to give them an excuse to invade Scandinavia, the Winter War was still of considerable international importance. If Finland weakened and the Soviet Union threatened to establish itself on the borders of Norway and Sweden, the Scandinavian governments might be willing to

⁶⁴Winston S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1948), 551.

⁶⁵Sir Edward Spears, Assignment to Catastrophe, Vol. I (New York: A. A. Wynn, Inc., 1954), 81.

grant transit to the Allies. If the war ended by negotiation, the British and French would have to drop their guise of aiding the Finns and launch a direct attack on a Scandinavia which might offer resistance to their efforts.⁶⁶

Finland now began to drop subtle hints to Ambassador Bluecher that it would be forced to request Allied aid if Germany did not help it to find a negotiated peace.⁶⁷ Bluecher disobeyed prior instructions to remain aloof from the subject of a negotiated settlement and began to encourage the German Foreign Office to use its influence at the Kremlin to bring an end to the war. His reports to Berlin painted a picture of despair in Finland. He said that a total Soviet victory would completely halt the already interrupted shipments of Finnish nickel, copper, and molybdenum; restrict traffic in the Baltic; and spread Russian influence into northern Sweden.⁶⁸ Bluecher was persistent in his efforts to get the Foreign Office to intervene, but he received only rebuke for his suggestions. Ribbentrop, in a tersely-worded cable, told him to: "Please refrain from any expression of sympathy for the Finnish position."⁶⁹

The activities of the Soviet navy in the Baltic had

⁶⁶Ziemke, 23.

⁶⁷DGFP, VIII, 613-614.

⁶⁸Ibid., 488-489.

⁶⁹Ibid., 501.

caused some concern to the Reich, but even here the Germans continued their policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union. Russia was attempting to blockade the Gulf of Bothnia in order to try to stop the passage of supplies from Sweden to Finland. The Kremlin requested that Germany aid its efforts by allowing German steamers to resupply Soviet submarines.⁷⁰ Admirals Raeder and Fricke gave their consent to the plan because they believed that it would not restrict German movement in that area and the favor might be used to extract future aid from the Soviet Union.⁷¹

Even though Germany had not yet chosen to become actively involved in the North, it was now forced to evaluate the four different courses of action which were developing in that area. These four courses were developing separately of each other, but they all seemed to be shaped by the events of the Winter War.

The first line of action was being determined by the Soviet Union. As long as the Russians persisted in their refusal to negotiate an end to the Winter War, the Allies could continue to plan their expedition through Scandinavia to relieve the Finns. As the war continued, the Scandinavians' anti-Soviet sentiment would increase, and this in turn would make them more amenable to cooperate with the Allies on

⁷⁰DGFP, VIII, 507.

⁷¹Ibid., 511-512.

the question of transit rights. Secondly, the Finnish Government, although it was anxious to end the war, was considering the offer of Allied aid. It had not as yet given the Allies a formal request for help, but if the Soviet Union seemed bent on a total victory, it would have no choice in the matter. The third course of action that the Reich had to consider was whether Scandinavia would continue to remain neutral. If the anti-German and anti-Soviet spirit began to outweigh the sentiment for neutrality, the Reich would have to consider intervention. The fourth threat in the Northern scheme was being shaped in Britain and France. France was very anxious to begin operations in the North, but Britain was reluctant to attempt a campaign there unless transit rights were received. Britain claimed that it was trying to protect the rights of democratic nations in Europe, and it believed that an attack on two neutral nations would tarnish its image as the protector of the smaller nations. This, then, was the situation in the North in December of 1939. The Winter War had not caused all of these new developments by itself, but it was a primary contributing factor to them.

Paralleling the Allied scheme of intervention were the German plans to counter any possible threat in the North. Late in December, the German Naval Attache' in Stockholm had told the Swedish Government that it should remain "benevolently

neutral" towards Finland.⁷² The unqualified suggestion of benevolent neutrality did give the Swedish Government considerable latitude in its attempt to aid Finland with volunteers and war matériel; however, the Swedes delivered the aid with considerable caution. The arms which were sent were made to appear as though they had been purchased by Finland, and all volunteers were forced to travel across Sweden unarmed and in civilian clothes.⁷³ On January 2, Prince zu Wied, the German representative to Stockholm, told Foreign Minister Gunter that Germany was studying the effect that Western assistance to Finland would have on Sweden's neutrality. The Swedish minister to Berlin was also informed on January 4 that cooperation with the Western powers in their attempt to aid Finland, " ... would not be consistent with Swedish neutrality."⁷⁴ Norwegian Foreign Minister Halvdan Koht said that he believed Norwegian assistance to the Allied plan would cause a German attack on Norway.⁷⁵

The German diplomatic line being employed in early January put pressure on Norway and Sweden, but it did not contain any explicit threats. At first, no concrete

⁷²C. Leonard Lundin, Finland in the Second World War (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 60.

⁷³Ibid., 65.

⁷⁴Ibid., 65-66.

⁷⁵Ibid., 67.

limitations were placed on the Scandinavian aid to Finland, but Sweden and Norway were given tacit reminders that Allied intervention would be a casus belli. Major-General von Uthman, the German Military Attache' to Sweden, told the Swedish cabinet that his Foreign Office was becoming "deeply concerned" with the segment of public opinion that called for active intervention in the Winter War.⁷⁶ In the face of the German concern, Sweden decided that it would not honor the Allied request for transit rights which had been made on December 19, 1939. On January 4, Sweden informed Great Britain that it would not allow a free passage to Finland; Norway issued a similar statement on January 15.⁷⁷

Behind this diplomatic pressure lay German military plans to end any possible threat in the North. In early December Vidkun Quisling, the leader of the Norwegian National Union Party and a Nazi sympathizer, made one of his periodic trips to Berlin for a conference with Hitler. While there, he spoke of the pro-British influence in the Norwegian government and intimated that a secret treaty which would allow the Allies to occupy Norway if the country were threatened by Germany existed.⁷⁸ His comments accented the suppositions which had already been made by Admiral Raeder.

⁷⁶Lundin, 66.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Woodward, 21-28, passim.

If Germany continued its plans in the West, Britain might well launch a surprise attack on the North. Hitler did not want to divert his attention from the West, but he did allow the OKW⁷⁹ to begin a study for an invasion of Norway. The OKW plans became known as Studie Nord, and they grew from Hitler's original limited objectives of controlling key ports in western Norway to the total occupation of both Norway and Denmark.⁸⁰ On January 10, Hitler released Studie Nord to the service high commands for further study.⁸¹

During January, the Finnish army continued to hold its own against the Russians. All fronts remained stable, and the military situation was not yet critical. However well the war might have been going at that time, Finland still realized the inevitable conclusion of a protracted struggle. Finland, then, continued to look for a country which would mediate a peaceful end to the war, and it looked upon Sweden and Germany as the countries that it would like to have act as intercessors. On January 4, Foreign Minister Tanner called Bluecher to his office and asked him if Germany could now try to act as a mediator in the war. Bluecher felt that

⁷⁹The OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) was the German Armed Forces High Command.

⁸⁰Franz Halder, The Private War Journal of Generaloberst Franz Halder, 14 August 1939 to 24 September 1942 (mimeographed), III, 5, 3. Hereafter cited as Halder Diaries.

⁸¹Ziemke, 12.

this was a bad time to try to begin the negotiations. The Soviet Union had not yet won a significant victory in the war, and he believed that Russia would not come to the conference table until it had begun to win the war.⁸²

Weizsaecker informed Ambassador Bluecher on January 17 that Ribbentrop wanted him to tell Tanner that there was no hope that Germany could help to end the war.⁸³

During the last half of January, Germany began to alter its diplomatic course slightly. The weather had indefinitely postponed any offensive in the West, and Studie Nord had been recalled for additional planning.⁸⁴ Admiral Raeder did not believe that a British invasion of Norway was imminent, and he called for a continuation of the status quo in the North.⁸⁵ Whether the military strategy in Studie Nord had any material effect on Germany's diplomatic line on the Winter War is difficult to assess. Admiral Raeder did believe that the war was causing popular opinion in Norway and Sweden to continue its call for active intervention. The Admiral also realized that the British would meet only a token amount of resistance to an attack if the current pro-Finnish attitude were to continue in Norway.⁸⁶ It is entirely possible that

⁸²Tanner, 117-118.

⁸³DGFP, VIII, 677.

⁸⁴Fuehrer Conferences, 1939, 62.

⁸⁵Ziemke, 12.

⁸⁶Ibid., 12.

Germany hoped to relieve some of the tension in the North by offering Finland at least the hope of a peaceful solution.

On January 24, Tanner intercepted a phone call made by Bluecher to the German Foreign Office. During the course of the conversation, Bluecher was told to say that German mediation might be considered.⁸⁷ Even before the Finns could begin to take advantage of this new development, Germany began to contact the Soviet Union on its own. Von Tippleskirch, the Secretary to the German Embassy in Moscow, had made an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the Winter War. He saw the disadvantages as: (1) the rise of anti-German sentiment in the North, (2) the loss in trade with Finland and Russia, and (3) the danger of Britain and France trying to intervene. On the side of the advantages were: (1) the postponement of Russian designs on Bessarabia, (2) the easing of Soviet tensions with Japan, and (3) the growing dependence of the USSR on Germany.⁸⁸ The day after this assessment was made, Ambassador Schulenburg called on Molotov. Schulenburg asked Molotov how long he thought the Winter War would last. He also pointed out that the war was hurting Russo-German trade relations, as the Soviet Union was finding it increasingly difficult to fill its trade commitments. Molotov replied that Germany would simply have to

⁸⁷Tanner, 122.

⁸⁸DGFP, VIII, 706-707.

accept the trade difficulties. He continued by saying that the Soviet Union still refused to negotiate with the Ryti-Tanner Government, and to the question as to whether he would confer with Pehr Svinhufvud should he be elected President of Finland, Molotov said, "Maybe."⁸⁹

Molotov's "maybe" was deceptive in that the Soviet Union had already been contacted by its Ambassador to Sweden, Madame Kollontai, on the possibility of beginning negotiations with Finland. On January 29, the Swedish Foreign Office received a communique from the Soviet Union which said that it did not regard a settlement with the Ryti-Tanner Government, " ... as being in principle unattainable." However, before any talks could begin, the Soviet Union would have to know in advance what concessions Finland would be willing to make.⁹⁰ The Finnish reply, which was made on February 2, said that Finland was willing to resume the negotiations which had been suspended in November. It was willing to cede land on the Karelian Isthmus and neutralize the Gulf of Finland under an international convention, but it was not willing to cede territory that would endanger its security.⁹¹ On February 5, the Soviet Union informed Finland through the Swedish Foreign Office that it could not accept these terms

⁸⁹DGFP, VIII, 708-709.

⁹⁰Tanner, 123.

⁹¹Ibid., 142-144; and Mannerheim, 379.

as a basis for negotiation.⁹²

On the same day that the Soviet Union informed Finland that it was not yet ready to negotiate, the Supreme Allied War Council was considering once again an attack on Norway which would precede an attempt to relieve Finland. Britain had come to begin a more serious consideration of an attack on Narvik,⁹³ and the French seemed to be ready to send aid to Finland as soon as possible. Paul Reynaud, who was shortly to become Premier of France, reported that the council had decided to send thirty thousand men to Narvik. He also stated:

When this body had been raised, the Allies after having persuaded Finland to call them to her aid, would use this appeal to ask Norway and Sweden to permit the passage of the troops. If this were rejected, 'There would be grounds,' Daladier stressed, 'for ignoring the refusal and carrying out the operation despite it.'⁹⁴

Winston Churchill was still the chief British proponent of active intervention. He said, "Small nations must not tie our hands when we are fighting for their rights and freedoms."⁹⁵ The expeditionary force to be sent was to be under British command, but no definite date was set for its

⁹²Mannerheim, 380-381.

⁹³Reynaud, 254.

⁹⁴Ibid., 256.

⁹⁵Churchill, 546.

departure. The Allies still seemed unsure of the resistance that they might meet in Scandinavia, and they continued to seek Finland's call for assistance.⁹⁶

As a coincidence, it was also on February 5 that the German plans for an invasion of the North began to take their final form. Studie Nord had been examined while Hitler had postponed the attack on France until March. The proposed invasion of Norway had now received the operational code name of Weseruebung, and Captain Theodor Krancke, the Commanding Officer of the cruiser Scheer, was made the senior officer for the staff that would continue to modify the plans. The subsequent Krancke Plans envisioned the occupation of six strategic coastal areas: the Oslo Fjord, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, Narvik, and Tromso. Air bases in northern Denmark were to be used in the operation, and, in order to lessen the Norwegian resistance, the Government was to be told that the occupation would terminate as soon as the war had ended.⁹⁷

Operation Weseruebung was as yet only a tactical exercise. Hitler had not decided to implement the plan yet, but he became more and more concerned with the Allied pressure on Norway in February.

The vulnerability of the German position in the North

⁹⁶Mannerheim, 381.

⁹⁷Ziemke, 14-16; and Halder, III, 28.

Sea was demonstrated on February 16. On that day, six British destroyers halted the German tanker Altmark in Norwegian territorial waters and removed three-hundred captured British seamen.⁹⁸ The seizure of the prisoners illustrated the tenuous safety of the Norwegian Leeds, and further seemed to indicate the assistance that Norway might give to Britain. Two Norwegian torpedo boats had been accompanying the Altmark, but they refused to try to repel the British cruisers.

Once Operation Wesseruebung began to take form, the Germans decided that there was less need for them to try to start negotiations between Finland and the Soviet Union. Still, the German Foreign Office displayed a quiet concern that the talks begin as soon as possible. On February 13, Bluecher received a cable from Ribbentrop which stated that Germany did not want to act as a mediator yet, but he could not predict how that decision would change in the next few weeks. He did give Bluecher permission to try to find out what Finland's terms for a negotiated settlement would be, and he was also to attempt to arrange for Berlin to be used as a possible site for talks.⁹⁹ On February 17, Bluecher did approach Tanner to suggest Berlin as a site for future negotiations with the Soviet Union. He was careful to say that the idea was his own so that Tanner would not think

⁹⁸Churchill, 564-565; and Ziemke, 16.

⁹⁹DGFP, VIII, 774.

that the German Foreign Office had altered its neutral position.¹⁰⁰ Tanner and Bluecher conversed again on February 20, and the Finnish Foreign Minister refused to tell the Ambassador if Finland were negotiating for Allied aid.¹⁰¹ Bluecher had become either quite alarmed with the situation or else he was trying to frighten his Foreign Office into trying to open talks with Russia when he filed a report on the situation in Finland on February 22. In the situation paper, he stressed that the Soviet penetration of the Mannerheim Line had made the Finnish Government much more anxious to receive outside aid. Bluecher felt that it would be best for Germany to try to end the Winter War before the Allies had an opportunity to intervene.¹⁰²

The subtly-phrased German overtures were not enough for the Finns. The Finnish Foreign Office was now weighing the Allied offer of assistance against the progress of the Swedish attempt to resume negotiations with the Soviet Union. The German attitude toward the Finnish dilemma had changed, but it had not changed sufficiently to guarantee that it would or even could bring an end to the hostilities.

Marshal Mannerheim, the Finnish Commander-in-Chief, felt that his army was holding out as well as could be expected.

¹⁰⁰DGFP, VIII, 778-779.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 785-786; and Tanner, 166-167.

¹⁰²DGFP, VIII, 802-804.

but he was in favor of trying to negotiate a peace. He felt that Allied aid should be requested only as a last resort.¹⁰³ On February 20, Mannerheim received British General Ling and Colonel Ganeval of the French Army. These officers had been sent to Helsinki to help clarify the Allied plans. They explained that an attack on Norway had been planned, but they expected that a German counterattack would perhaps prevent any assistance from reaching Finland.¹⁰⁴ Ganeval also told Tanner that the Allies were to attempt a passage across Scandinavia with or without transit rights, and the Swedish iron fields would have to be secured before any of the expeditionary force could be sent to Finland. Tanner's evaluation of this information caused him to say, "On this basis Finland assumed a pretty dubious attitude."¹⁰⁵ He realized that Finland was being used as an excuse to help the Allies secure more important military targets. A Finnish request for the Allied aid began to center on three as yet unanswered questions: (1) How many volunteers would there be? (2) Would Norway and Sweden grant the transit rights? and (3) Would the assistance arrive in time to be of any help?¹⁰⁶

The Soviet Union furthered the possibility of negotiations

¹⁰³Tanner, 152-153.

¹⁰⁴Mannerheim, 381.

¹⁰⁵Tanner, 170-171.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 173.

when it forwarded its minimal demands to the Swedish Foreign Office on February 24. In order for negotiations to be successful, Finland would have to be willing to cede Hanko, the entire Karelian Isthmus, and the northeastern shore of Lake Ladoga.¹⁰⁷ Tanner left for Stockholm to meet with Madame Kollontai on February 26. As soon as he arrived, he spoke to Finland's ambassador to Sweden. He told Kivimäki that the Germans had advised him to make peace even if the terms were unfavorable. He believed that Germany had made an attempt to act as mediator, but Russia had turned the proposal down.¹⁰⁸ On February 28, the Finnish Diet announced that it would consider the Soviet demands as a point of departure for the talks.¹⁰⁹

As soon as Finland decided to negotiate, the Allies began to press the question of intervention. On March 1, the British Ambassador to Finland, Gordon Vereker, told Tanner, "If the Scandinavian countries do not permit the Western forces to pass through their territories so much the worse for them."¹¹⁰ To amplify the confusion that surrounded Allied intentions, Tanner noted that Vereker informed him two days later that he did not know what the Allies would

¹⁰⁷Tanner, 172.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 180.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 194-195.

¹¹⁰Tanner, 199.

do if transit rights were not given.¹¹¹ It did seem that France was most anxious to see the plans begin. Without consulting Britain, Premier Daladier, on March 2, promised to send forty to fifty thousand men to Finland. When Churchill heard of this offer he felt that it was foolish in view of the impending German attack on France and Belgium.¹¹² The possibility of Allied aid actually arriving was lessened when Tanner received word from Sweden that it would attempt to stop troop passage by force if Germany requested them to do so.¹¹³

Upon the advice of Marshal Mannerheim that the army could not hope to hold out much longer, the Finnish Government decided to negotiate and not request Allied aid.¹¹⁴ On March 6, Molotov said that an armistice could begin if the city of Viipuri and Viipuri Bay were evacuated. These conditions were reluctantly met, and the talks began at the Kremlin on March 8.¹¹⁵

Even at this late date, the Allies continued to press the Finns to accept their offer of assistance. On March 9, the Finnish Ministers in Paris and London were told that, if

¹¹¹Tanner, 205.

¹¹²Churchill, 573.

¹¹³Tanner, 210.

¹¹⁴Mannerheim, 387.

¹¹⁵Tanner, 213.

Finland would issue a call for help, the Allies would come to their aid with all possible speed. They promised to deliver one-hundred bombers in two weeks, but the dispatch of the troops was still dependent upon the attitude of Norway and Sweden on transit rights.¹¹⁶ Because of the uncertainty of the situation, Marshal Mannerheim gave his categorical opinion that the Soviet terms should be accepted. On March 12, just hours before the Russo-Finnish peace talks reached their conclusion, Allied troops boarded British ships for a "peaceful" invasion of Norway. A landing was to be made at Narvik to test the degree of Norwegian resistance, and then, if the troops found the Norwegians to be cooperative, the rest of the force was to land at Bergen and Stavanger. After the Finns signed the peace treaty in Moscow, the two divisions were diverted to France and the invasion was cancelled.¹¹⁷

Hitler's attitude toward Finland had remained completely unchanged during the course of the developments in February and early March. The Fuehrer realized that the Winter War had caused the focal point of the war to shift to the North, but he also realized that he could gain security in Scandinavia without intervening in Finland and thereby causing a diplomatic breach with the Soviet Union. On March 4, in a

¹¹⁶Mannerheim, 388.

¹¹⁷Churchill, 573.

second conversation with Sven Hedin, Hitler said that Germany's sympathy remained with Russia. He added that he would intervene in the North only if the Allies tried to cross Norway and Sweden.¹¹⁸ In a letter to Mussolini on March 8, Hitler again declared that "Germany had no particular obligations toward Finland."¹¹⁹

Hitler could well afford to ignore Finland in view of the fact that Norway and Sweden were continuing to refuse transit rights to the Allies and his own plans for invading the North were progressing rapidly. On February 21, General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, who had led the German expedition to Finland in 1918, was given the command of Operation Weseruebung. Hitler, on March 1, then issued his "Directive for Case Weseruebung" and established the primary objectives of the invasion. The strategic objectives were to forestall an Allied invasion of Norway and to provide security for the Swedish iron fields.¹²⁰ Admiral Raeder believed that a prompt execution of the plan was imperative in order to prevent the Allied invasion under the pretext of sending aid to Finland.¹²¹ When Allied submarines were spotted off the Skagerrak on the 13th, an immediate implementation of

¹¹⁸DGFP, VIII, 862-864.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 877.

¹²⁰Ziemke, 18-19.

¹²¹Fuehrer Conferences, 1940, 20.

Operation Wesseruebung was readied; but when the Russo-Finnish Peace Treaty went into effect and the submarines withdrew on the 15th, Hitler felt that the invasion of Norway could then proceed "without excessive haste."¹²²

The peace treaty that Finland signed on the evening of the 12th was harsh. Finland was forced to cede all of the Karelian Isthmus, lease Hanko, build a railroad to connect northern Finland to Soviet Karelia, and promise not to make any alliances which would be directed against the Soviet Union.¹²³ Finland's line of defense was now impaired, its economy in ruins, and its isolation complete. Russia had not achieved the total victory that it desired, but it had made inroads which could be used to pressure Finland into cooperating with the Soviet Union in the future.

In an itemized account of his estimation of the future effects of the Russo-Finnish Treaty, Bluecher predicted that: (1) Russia would now control the Gulf of Finland and the central portion of the Baltic, (2) Finland would no longer be able to ally itself with Scandinavia, and (3) future tensions in the Baltic had to be anticipated.¹²⁴

The Winter War had given Germany serious problems to

¹²²Ziemke, 20.

¹²³For the complete text of the Russo-Finnish Peace Treaty see Soviet Documents, III, 421-423.

¹²⁴DGFP, VIII, 914-915.

contend with. The invasion of France had to be postponed, its supply of iron ore had been threatened, and an ultimate invasion of Norway had to be contemplated and prepared for. Throughout this period of crisis, the Reich continued to honor its prior commitments to the Soviet Union. The relationship between Germany and Russia had not been a cordial one, but the Reich did allow the Soviet Union to attempt to spread its sphere of influence northward into Finland. To Germany, Finland was still just the price that it had to pay for Soviet cooperation while it continued its campaign in the West.

CHAPTER III

THE INTERIM

After the signing of the Russo-Finnish Peace Treaty, the German OKW theorized that, since the Allies had now lost their pretext for invading Norway, the immediate pressure to act in the North was relieved and Operation Weseruebung was temporarily cancelled. Hitler, however, was not deluded into believing that Britain had given up all hope of stopping Germany's supply of iron ore. As long as Great Britain maintained its naval superiority in the North Sea, it could decide to defend the Norwegian Leeds and accomplish its strategic objectives without invading the mainland. Prompted by Admiral Raeder to face the problem, which seemingly could only be overcome by an invasion of Norway, Hitler announced that April 9 would be "Weser Day."¹

On the morning of April 9, the German Blitzkrieg began to move through Denmark and Norway. The campaign to conquer Norway proved to be more difficult than had been expected. The German navy lost the heavy cruiser Bluecher, and the Scharnhorst and the Eneisenau were badly damaged. The army met stiff resistance from the Allies in and around Narvik,

¹Ziemke, 19-22.

but Norway was taken with a loss of only 1,317 killed, a small number for such an important victory. By June 8, the Allies had evacuated their forces from Norway, and on June 9 the Norwegian army surrendered. By this victory, Hitler had made himself the undisputed master of the Baltic Sea and Scandinavia.²

The Winter War had left Finland independent but very close to the brink of economic, military, and political disaster. Now that trade with Great Britain had been all but stopped,³ Finland had to begin to find new markets. Even if Finland could find other markets, it was doubtful that the nation could redevelop its productive capacity for a number of years. The areas in the south which had been ceded to Russia contained most of Finland's limited industry, and what plants that had not been confiscated by the Soviet Union were destroyed in the war. The Soviet acquisition of Salla and the area surrounding it gave the Russians a salient from which to launch an attack into central Finland. The Mannerheim Line had been lost with the cession of the Karelian Isthmus, and the Soviet troops in Hanko threatened Finland's western coast. In the north, the Russians had acquired the western half of the Rybachiy Peninsula. From this vantage

²Ziemke, 109-112.

³In the pre-war years, Great Britain had been receiving over fifty per cent of Finland's exports.

point, they could threaten Finland's only port in the north and possibly control the rich nickel fields of Petsamo to the south. If the Soviets decided to resume the war, it could develop a series of irresistible pincer movements which would fragment and conquer Finland. In June, when Norway and France were going down to defeat, Finland was isolated from the West. The conquest of Norway blocked the path of any new Allied support. The defeat of Norway also isolated Sweden, making it impossible for a Finno-Swedish alliance because of Sweden's new dependence on Germany. The fall of France eliminated the Allied presence on the Continent, and allowed Hitler to strengthen his gains and prepare for new ones. With Germany and the Soviet Union as the two remaining Continental powers, Finland's destiny now lay in their hands.⁴ A distinct political triangle was now being formed in reference to Finland. Germany would begin to become more interested in Finland, and the Soviet Union would increase its everpresent interest. Finland, caught at the apex of the triangle, would be forced to look to both the East and the West as it became the subject of the conflicting German and Russian strategies.

It is not entirely clear why the Soviet Union chose to halt the Winter War when it did. The threat of Allied intervention, the growing Nazi influence in southern Europe, and

⁴Mannerheim, 382-395, passim.

the toll of men and material exacted by the fierce Finnish resistance, all played a part in bringing an early end to the struggle. What is certain is the fact that the Soviet Union continued to fear and distrust the Nazis, and it was not at all pleased by the rapid German victories in the West. The Russians had hoped that Germany would become involved in a long war of attrition so that they could solidify their own gains in the Baltic. Russia had halted its military advance into Finland, but it by no means intended to stop political pressures. Germany, on the other hand, was now occupied with Operation Sea Lion, the plan that it hoped would materialize in the invasion and conquest of Great Britain. Germany, as long as it was still tied down in the West, was content to allow Russia to maintain its sphere of influence in the Baltic.

The immediate Finnish reaction to the conquest of Norway was mixed. The Finns were sympathetic with Norway, but the extension of the war to the North did not cause a wave of anti-Nazi hysteria. Finland was forced to evaluate the new political realities of Europe. The evaluation of the latest events produced the realization that Hitler was the master of Europe. It was then felt that Finland should begin to implement a policy of Realpolitik in its future relations with the Reich.⁵

⁵Anthony F. Upton, Finland in Crisis, 1940-1941 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 91-94.

Germany's first indication of its latent interest in Finland came shortly after the Winter War had ended. The Reich's Economic Policy Department issued a memorandum on March 28 which stated that an economic agreement should be concluded with Finland " ... to forestall similar wishes on the part of Russia and the Western Powers."⁶ The report continued with an assessment of the possible bases of a future trade relationship. The level of Finland's pre-war production was severely reduced, but Germany hoped that the production of metals needed by the Reich would soon begin. Finland's entire production of copper had been going to Germany and the shipments were to be resumed as soon as transportation difficulties were cleared up. Nickel was the metal most desired by the Germans, but the future shipments of this commodity was clouded by several political problems. First of all, the mines in the Petsamo region were being operated by a Canadian concessionaire, the Mond Nickel Corporation. If the company continued its lease, it undoubtedly would refuse to sell its ore to Germany. Secondly, the German government had negotiated an agreement in October, 1939, which proposed to send one-hundred and thirty-four anti-aircraft guns to Finland in exchange for a promise to increase the production of copper and nickel. Only fifty of the guns had been sent to Finland before the outbreak of the Winter

⁶DGFP, IX, 32.

War, and it was felt that the Finnish Government would press for the delivery of the other eighty-three guns before a new agreement on the nickel could be made. This was thought to be impossible because of the Russian objections that would arise from a rearmament of Finland. The most ominous threat to successful trade in nickel was the fact that the Soviet Union was beginning to show considerable interest in obtaining the Petsamo concession for itself. Germany, if Russia continued to press its claims on the area, would have to choose between implementing its own economic interests in the area and the continuation of friendly relations with the USSR. Still another difficulty in establishing economic intercourse with Finland was the fact that the Finns would want to export large quantities of wood products to Germany in exchange for finished metal goods, a commodity the Reich could not afford to export because of its own war needs. Karl Schnurre was sent to Helsinki on April 8 to act as a special plenipotentiary in negotiating a trade program.⁷

The German Foreign Office had already begun a discreet appraisal of the Soviet attitude toward the Petsamo question before it made any firm commitments with the Finns. In the course of a conversation on the Russo-Finnish Peace Treaty, Ambassador Schulenburg inquired about the future fate of Petsamo. Molotov informed him that the Soviet Union had

⁷DGFP, IX, 32-35.

allowed Finland to retain Petsamo on the condition that no military bases would be constructed there and no Allied warships would be allowed to be stationed in the northern ports.⁸

The German plans to invade Norway and Denmark would naturally disturb the Soviet Union, and plans to begin even the slightest influence in the eastern Baltic would cause a major shift in the diplomatic climate between the two countries. On April 7, Ribbentrop instructed von Schulenburg to inform Molotov, once the invasion had begun, that "Sweden and Finland will in no way be affected by our plans." He was also to explain that the occupation of Norway would help the USSR in that it would prevent any future reopening of the Finnish question by the British and French.⁹ These assurances were meant to allay any Soviet suspicions, but because the northern borders of Norway overlapped those of Sweden and extended to the very edge of Petsamo, the German army would then be within a short distance of Murmansk and the Murmansk Railroad. With this in mind, the Soviet fears and feelings of insecurity could not help but be increased by the invasion. On April 11, after Schulenburg had completed his talks with Molotov, he noted an "unfavorable shift" in Soviet attitude. Molotov was worried that the war would move to Sweden and then to the eastern Baltic. A concrete example of the

⁸DGFP, IX, 37-40.

⁹Ibid., 137-138.

new Soviet attitude was displayed when Molotov announced that Russia would not honor its promise to supply Germany with the northern naval base it had promised earlier.¹⁰ The Soviet Union obviously felt that German influence was spreading rapidly enough by itself without adding to it.

The April trade negotiations with Finland produced no firm results, but Germany did make it known that it was interested in Petsamo. Finland was reluctant to give broad trade concessions to Germany at a time when Russia was beginning to make its post-war claims on the country. The Soviet Union was particularly disturbed that Finland had removed machinery from the areas that had been ceded by the treaty. Although there had been no clause in the treaty which stated that the machinery was to be given to the Soviets, they maintained that the transfer had been implied.¹¹ While Germany was still unwilling to give any protective assurances to Finland, the Finns were reticent to cooperate in areas that they knew would offend Russia. However, moves to strengthen ties with Germany were made. One notable move to establish a rapport with the Reich was the appointment of Professor T. M. Kivimäki as the new ambassador to Germany. Kivimäki had held high government posts and his pro-German

¹⁰DGFP, IX, 138-140.

¹¹Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc., 1941), 7-9.

leaning was a recognized fact.¹²

Trade talks with Finland resumed in early June. At this session, Germany said that it wished to take over the Petsamo concession in the near future. The Finns were still reluctant to go this far, but they did promise that Germany would receive seventy-five per cent of the ore once production resumed. Since the agreement could not possibly go into effect at that time, it was not communicated to the Soviet Union.¹³

On June 14, the German army began to occupy Finnmark, the northernmost province of Norway. With troops stationed at Kirkenes, the largest city in the province, the Nazis were in a position to exert a military control over Petsamo if it so desired.¹⁴ It was by no coincidence then that on June 23 Molotov informed Finnish Ambassador Paasikivi that Russia wanted to obtain the Petsamo nickel concession. Paasikivi told Molotov that such a plan was not possible since the Mond Nickel Company already had the concession rights.¹⁵ Several days later, Molotov informed Paasikivi that his government was not only interested in the Petsamo nickel, but it was interested in the area itself. He said that it

¹²Upton, 100.

¹³Ibid., 106-107.

¹⁴Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 50-51.

¹⁵Ibid., 51.

was necessary to eliminate British influence in the area.¹⁶ Great Britain did continue to carry on a very limited trade with Finland through the ports in the north, but the Soviet anxiety could only have been caused by the recent German occupation of Finnmark. If the Soviet Union could control the narrow sleeve that separated Finnmark from Soviet Karelia, it could observe the military build up in the area.

The completion of the Finno-German contract on the Petsamo nickel had to be delayed because of the new Soviet demands. The German Embassy had informed Molotov that the Reich was interested in obtaining nickel from the area, but it did not tell him that negotiations had begun. Molotov told Schulenburg that the Soviet Union was ready to guarantee Germany fifty per cent of the Petsamo output and the German request for seventy-five per cent of the ore would receive "sympathetic study."¹⁷ Germany pretended to negotiate with Russia for a percentage of the nickel, but it was still felt that a Soviet control of the area would severely complicate the acquisition of the nickel. The Soviet Union might be willing to give Germany a majority of the ore, but constant negotiations would be required to insure that the German demands were met.¹⁸

¹⁶Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 51.

¹⁷DGFP, IX, 87.

¹⁸Ibid., 108-109.

On July 4, Bluecher reported from Helsinki that pro-German sentiment in Finland was growing in "avalanche proportions." He felt that efforts were being made to establish a pro-German government, but he had cautioned various Finnish leaders that the sentiment should not be developed too quickly or the Soviet Union would become suspicious.¹⁹

The pro-German sentiment in Finland was a result of a renewed anti-Soviet hatred. Finland's post-war policy of trying to cooperate with the Soviet Union had produced very little results. The USSR was looking for security, not amiable relations; and to strengthen its position in the North, Russia had to continue to make extensive demands on Finland. On July 9, the Finnish Foreign Ministry was informed that Article 4 of the peace treaty, which gave the Soviets the lease on Hanko, would have to be supplemented so that Soviet trains could run on Finnish rails to the port.²⁰ The Soviet Union's pretext for the request was that it was difficult to supply its station there by sea. In reality it wanted to establish a line of communication through southern Finland which could be used in time of war.

Later in the month the Soviet Union did soften its stand on the Petsamo question. It informed Finland that it

¹⁹DGFP, IX, 121-122.

²⁰Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 53.

would settle for an agreement which would give it forty per cent of the nickel production for 1940 if the remaining sixty per cent would go to Germany.²¹ This decision meant that only the most immediate problem concerning the Petsamo nickel had been temporarily settled. The dispute on concession rights would continue for the next eleven months.

If there is a decisive turning point in Nazi Germany's diplomatic attitude toward Finland, it would have to be dated from July 22, 1940. On this day, Hitler, in a meeting with his General Staff, said that a possible invasion of Russia had to be planned and Finland was mentioned as a gateway of attack.²² Up to this time, any German interest in Finland had to be tempered by the conditions of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Now, as the plans for the invasion of Russia progressed, Germany could afford to discount the effect that its influence in Finland would have on its relations with the Soviet Union. The Reich would now only have to mask the inroads it was making into Finland so Russia would not become unduly suspicious and begin to anticipate the attack that was forthcoming.

The initial plans that were being developed were as yet very nebulous and intended as hypothetical preparations for a possible course of action. The preliminary plans were born

²¹Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 54; and DGFP, IX, 185-186.

²²Halder Diaries, IV, 128.

of the frustration that accompanied the extended delay in the proposed invasion of Great Britain. The British Isles had withstood the seige of Britain, and the British domination of the sea plus its growing strength in the air prevented Germany from gaining the necessary cover it needed to support an amphibious landing. Hitler believed that Britain's will to continue the war had been revived, and he attributed the revival to that nation's growing hope of an alliance with the Soviet Union. General Franz Halder, the Army's Chief of Staff reported that the Fuehrer had said, "With Russia smashed, Britain's last hope will be shattered. Russia's destruction must be made a part of this struggle."²³ The attack was tentatively scheduled for the spring of 1941.

From the beginning of August a gradual change in Finno-German relations was begun. At first, the talks on Petsamo continued to highlight the German interest in Finland, but military involvement was soon begun. The Petsamo negotiations had worn themselves into a predictable routine. The Soviet Union continued to press for the concession, and Finland continued to stall with a variety of excuses. Germany wished to keep the Soviet Union ignorant of its talks with Finland and it wanted the Finns to negotiate with the Russians in a "dilatatory manner," but the Reich was still unwilling to give anything but tacit moral support to aid

²³Halder Diaries, IV, 141, 144.

in the talks.

Bluecher, now that he saw a renewed German interest in Finland, began once more to cable reports on the importance of Finland to the war effort. He said that the Petsamo concession would give Germany a twenty-year supply of nickel, and he was positive that the Finns were ready to sign a favorable agreement with the Reich. He also cautioned that a Russian occupation of the Aaland Islands would make " ... Germany's military-political position in the North untenable."²⁴ Finland had once again been trying to interest Sweden in a bilateral defense of the Aalands, and the Soviet Union was opposing the plan. Russia felt that Finland was planning to turn whatever fortifications were built over to Germany, and it felt that it should be able to take part in any scheme to defend the islands.

Ambassador Bluecher was no longer the only one to call for an increased influence in Finland. Marshal Keitel, the Chief of Staff of the German Armed Forces High Command, told Weizsaecker that the OKW would regret a new Russo-Finnish war. OKW, in view of the new Soviet troop movement to and from Hanko, felt that a word of restraint should be given to Russia, reminding it of the German economic interests in Finland. Weizsaecker felt that the diplomatic situation between Russia and Germany would not permit such a blunt

²⁴DGFP, X, 405.

proposal. He believed that the only thing that could be done at the time would be to make a discreet inquiry to the USSR to find out if it had any "new plans" for Finland.²⁵

The first indication of Germany's military cooperation with Finland came on August 12, when Hitler gave his permission to allow a pre-Winter War arms contract between Denmark and Finland to be completed. When Denmark and Norway were invaded, large shipments of arms which were intended for delivery to Finland had been captured by the Nazis. General Keitel reported that Hitler was now beginning a program of "indirect and inconspicuous encouragement of the Finns."²⁶ Hitler had made inquiries about the strength of Finland's army, and he felt that the country could not continue to resist the Soviet pressures while it was in such a weakened state. If Germany gave Finland an indication of future support, Finland could be expected to resist the Russian attempts to gain Petsamo.²⁷

The time was not yet ripe for a large scale German intervention into Finland. Hitler was still contemplating the beginning of Operation Sea Lion in August,²⁸ and an overt interest in Finland would still be premature. The Finns were

²⁵DGFP, X, 460.

²⁶Ibid., 467.

²⁷Halder Diaries, IV, 157.

²⁸Ibid., 159.

anxious to receive any support that the Germans might offer. On August 14, Ambassador Kivimäki asked if Germany would at least give diplomatic support to Finland in case of a new Russo-Finnish war. Kivimäki was undoubtedly looking for more than diplomatic support, but, in any case, the German Foreign Office refused to give him an answer.²⁹ Even silence was encouraging to the Finns after nearly a year of negative replies to the same query.

The German military was not following the Foreign Office's line of cautious correctness.³⁰ On August 17, a Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Veltjens, acting as a special representative of Reichsmarshal Goering, met with Finland's Marshal Mannerheim. In their conversation, Veltjens said that Germany would be willing to supply Finland with certain war materials in return for transit rights to northern Norway and an option on the Petsamo nickel concession. Mannerheim said that he could not make a decision on what he believed to be a political, rather than a military matter, and he referred Veltjens to President Ryti. Ryti gave his assent to the plan, as the presence of even a limited number of German troops would help to curb the omnipresent Soviet demands.³¹ Ryti

²⁹DGFP, X, 478-479.

³⁰The German Foreign Office was not informed of Veltjens' mission to Helsinki for several months.

³¹Mannerheim, 399. Ryti later claimed that he had not given Veltjens any approval of the plan, but he did say that he was in favor of it.

announced on the same day, "We Finns are realists. We have tried to maintain good relations with Russia, and we hope that Russia has the same idea."³² This speech was intended to assuage the Soviet doubts as to the course of Finland's diplomacy, but the key word in the address was "realists." If the Finns were indeed realists, they would soon choose to cooperate with Germany rather than continue to try to appease the Soviet Union.

The passage of the troops through Finland was to be explained to the Soviet Union in cautious terms. The route to Kirkenes through Finland was shorter and more easily travelled than any existing line of communication through Norway. The Soviets were to be told that the men who were to pass through Finland were replacements. It was obvious that Germany intended to make more use of the transit rights than this. On August 22, Hitler decided to send two mountain divisions to Kirkenes via Finland, many more men than were actually needed to garrison the remote province. On August 26, the Fuehrer announced that Finland was to be supported by German arms and planes. More important yet, he said that Germany would occupy Petsamo if Russia attacked Finland again.³³ The arms shipments were to be disguised so Russia would not know that they were German. As Hitler said, "It

³²Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 58-60.

³³Halder Diaries, IV, 168, 174; and DGFP, X, 512.

must be brought home to the Russians that the shipments now being made to Finland are merely the last of the arms deliveries held up by the war."³⁴

On August 14, Ribbentrop quizzed the Russian ambassador to Berlin on the "stiffening" of Russo-Finnish relations. He said that he was curious to know if an understanding on the fortification of the Aaland Islands had been made between Finland and Russia. Germany had no intentions of trying to participate as a defender of the islands, but it let Russia know that it wanted to be part of any new convention that might decide their fate.³⁵

The final draft of the transit treaty was completed on September 12. Four main points were covered in the treaty: (1) Germany was allowed to transport troops from Finnish ports on the Baltic to Kirkenes by way of the northern Arctic Highway, (2) The Reich was to inform Finland of the intended ports of debarkation, the number of vessels, dates of arrival, and stages of transportation through the north, (3) Finland was to be informed of the arrival of troops at least one day in advance, and (4) troops and ordnance were to travel separately.³⁶ The spirit of the agreement can be gauged by the fact that OKW was confident that the Finns .

³⁴Halder Diaries, IV, 179.

³⁵Nazi-Soviet Relations, 177.

³⁶DGFP, XI, 148-149; and Mannerheim, 400.

would ignore Article 4.³⁷

The troop movement was to be presented to the Soviet Union as a fait accompli. In advance instructions to Ambassador Schulenburg, Ribbentrop wanted Molotov informed that the English air attacks on Germany necessitated the emplacement of an antiaircraft battalion in northern Norway; since the best route lay through Finland, the troops would be transported from Haparanda to Kirkenes beginning September 22.³⁸ Molotov was to be told this information on September 21, but Hitler later decided against informing the Russians at all.³⁹ The fact that the Russians were not told of the troop movements is indicative of the fact that Germany realized how serious this new departure from the old Nazi-Soviet accord really was. Germany undoubtedly believed that there was a good chance that Russia would try to stop the transit. On September 23, the Finnish foreign minister did inform the British and Soviet ambassadors of the troop movements. The Soviet ambassador was quite excited and asked if the Germans had presented the Finns with an ultimatum on the matter. He was even more alarmed when he was told that they had not.

Molotov had no intention of receiving the explanation of

³⁷DGFP, XI, 149.

³⁸Nazi-Soviet Relations, 188-189. The troop movement was to begin on the day that the treaty was formally signed.

³⁹DGFP, XI, 92-93.

the troop movement at face value. He demanded that Schulenburg give him the text of the treaty, including any secret portions that accompanied it. He also wanted to be informed in advance of the dates of departure and size of any future troop movements.⁴⁰ Ribbentrop answered this request for further information with a communique that simply reiterated the text of the transit treaty which the Soviet Union had already received from Finland.⁴¹ Molotov was not at all pleased with the Reich's effusive answer. He immediately informed Ribbentrop that the Non-Aggression Pact had placed Finland within the Soviet sphere of influence and that he considered the latest German move as a breach of the treaty.⁴² Russia attempted to meet the Nazi threat by demanding that Finland grant Russian representatives unrestricted travel rights within their consular territories. If Russia could not stop the movements or gain information on them from Germany, it could assess the situation by itself.⁴³

By October 19, 4,800 men, 587 vehicles, and an anti-aircraft battalion had been transported to Kirkenes.⁴⁴ As the German military presence in Finland began to increase,

⁴⁰DGFP, XI, 195-196; and Nazi-Soviet Relations, 197-199.

⁴¹Ibid., 236-238; 201-203.

⁴²Ibid., 244-245; 203-204.

⁴³Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 64.

⁴⁴DGFP, XI, 329.

the Reich started to become more involved in the diplomatic disputes between Finland and Russia on the Aaland and Petsamo questions. Previously, only Sweden had been an interested ally in the defense of the islands. Now, Finland was trying to involve Germany in the scheme. Germany, however, was only interested in trying to exclude the Soviet Union from any new defense plans. To the German Foreign Office, only a unilateral Finnish fortification or a total demilitarization of the islands would serve as an acceptable solution to the problem.⁴⁵ Finland continued to stall on the Soviet request to participate in the defense plans by saying that the 1921 Aaland Convention signators would have to give their approval before any new plan would be legal. Molotov appeared doubtful of this explanation, and he sarcastically asked if Poland's approval was being sought. His disgust at the constant Finnish delays in the pending agreements prompted him to say: "With the Germans one meaning the Finns can settle even big matters in a few days."⁴⁶ When the Finns realized that the Russians could be delayed no longer, they negotiated a demilitarization agreement with them on October 11. By this agreement, Finland promised to demilitarize the islands and not allow them to be placed at the disposal of any other power. The Soviet Union gained the right to maintain

⁴⁵DGFP, XI, 35-36.

⁴⁶Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 63-64.

consular offices on the main islands to observe the demilitarization and see that no new fortifications were built.⁴⁷ This settlement seemed more desirable to the Finns than a military cooperation with the Soviets, but Finland was still very interested in trying to get the Germans involved in the islands. Shortly after the agreement with Russia had been signed, President Ryti and Marshal Mannerheim told Lieutenant-Colonel Veltjens that they hoped Germany would settle the Aaland dispute by occupying the islands. If an occupation would not be feasible at that time, Finland would cooperate with the Germans whenever they thought that an invasion would be convenient.⁴⁸

The Petsamo negotiations continued to produce nothing but the same obstinate impasse. The Soviets seemed more anxious to gain the concessions now that German troops were in the area, but they were also forced to modify their demands for the same reason. Molotov informed Ambassador Paasikivi on September 14 that the Soviet Union wanted the Petsamo concession or the institution of a joint Russo-Finnish company to direct the production of the ore. Paasikivi tried to explain the difficulty of arranging either of the two proposals. First of all, it was still felt that it would not be legal to revoke the Mond Company's concession. Secondly,

⁴⁷Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 65-67.

⁴⁸DGFP, XI, 361.

since Finland had already refused the German request for the concession for the same reason, it would now be very difficult to reverse the decision in favor of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹

In mid-September, the Finns once again asked the German Foreign Office about its interest in Petsamo. Weizsaecker told Paasikivi that Germany had given up the idea of trying to obtain the concession, but it was still interested in seeing that the Russians did not get a foothold in the area.⁵⁰ On October 8, Ribbentrop indicated that it would try to give Finland more support. Russia had continued its impatient demands for a settlement on Petsamo, and Germany felt that the Finns' will to resist had to be bolstered once again. Arms were sent to Finland, but Germany still wished to maintain peace in the Baltic. Finland was advised to continue the "dilatory negotiations" as long as it could.⁵¹

In late October and early November, the Petsamo talks were reaching a point of crisis. Paasikivi was again asked why a settlement had not been reached. Molotov claimed that he had received permission from the British to transfer the concession to the Soviet Union.⁵² He said that if Finland

⁴⁹Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 61-62.

⁵⁰DGFP, XI, 105.

⁵¹Ibid., 270-271, 328, 397-398.

⁵²Britain had said that if the concession were transferred it would like to see Russia receive it if they promised to ship no ore to Germany.

did not deliver a definite answer on the question in two or three days, " ... the USSR would be compelled to take measures which the situation demanded."⁵³ The Finns still did not promise to agree to the proposal despite the Soviet threat. The tensions between Russia and Finland continued until Molotov went to Berlin in November for conferences with Hitler and Ribbentrop.

For several months the German Foreign Office had been trying to get Molotov to come to Berlin for talks. The Soviet Foreign Commissar traveled little, but since Ribbentrop had been to Moscow on several occasions it was felt that he should reciprocate the visits. Although the talks of November 12 and 13 covered a wide variety of topics, they did display the underlying currents of tension that existed between the two powers on the subject of Finland. The growing Nazi influence in Finland seemed to dominate Molotov's remarks from the beginning of the talks. In a review of the success of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, Molotov said that every article had been fulfilled except for Finland. Molotov believed that, while he had no criticism of the German attitude during the Winter War, Germany was not respecting the proposed Russian sphere of influence in Finland. Hitler replied that he had no political interest in Finland, but he was interested in resuming economic relations and maintaining

⁵³Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 73.

the transit agreement to facilitate the troop movement to northern Norway. As to the recent Soviet pressures on Finland, the Fuehrer told Molotov that Germany could not allow a new war to develop in the Baltic. The world's sentiment was with Finland, and the war would cause severe hardships on the Reich's war effort. Molotov complained that the German troops in Finland caused the Finns to be intransigent in their relations with the Soviet Union. The troops, Hitler said, were not permanently stationed there and they would be removed in the near future. In the meantime, Germany would have to leave them there in order to help move troops to Norway.⁵⁴

Although very little was decided at the meetings, the talks have to be considered as a diplomatic victory for the Germans. Russia had tried to eliminate the German presence in its sphere of influence, but Hitler asserted that the status quo would have to be maintained due to the situation of the war. Molotov was quite adamant and even a little menacing when he spoke of Finland. He said that the Reich's diplomacy was ambiguous, and he asserted that Nazi-Soviet relations could be cleared up only if an understanding were reached on Finland. Since no understanding was reached, it was an indication that Finland had finally begun to supercede Germany's interest in maintaining friendly relations

⁵⁴Nazi-Soviet Relations, 234-240.

with the USSR.⁵⁵

The Soviet Union continued to try to force Germany to limit its influence in Finland after the talks had ended. On November 26, Molotov informed the German Foreign Office that Russia would join the Axis Powers in the recently proposed Four Power Pact⁵⁶ if, among other things, Germany withdrew its troops from Finland and negotiated a new secret protocol on the area.⁵⁷ The Reich ignored the Soviet request, although Russia continued to ask for a reply.⁵⁸

Despite the Soviet concern over Finland, Reichsmarshal Goering decided to send Lieutenant-Colonel Veltjens to Helsinki to continue military talks on November 25. Finnish military strength was to be assessed and the Finns were to be given a review of the talks with Molotov. They were told that the final decision on the Petsamo question was up to them, but they need not worry about any future tensions.⁵⁹ The Reich had not yet promised to aid Finland in a war with Russia, but the Finns were led to believe that its assistance was inevitable. When Veltjens returned to Berlin, he reported that

⁵⁵Nazi-Soviet Relations, 240-247.

⁵⁶A Three Power Pact had been signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan on September 27, 1940.

⁵⁷Nazi-Soviet Relations, 258-259.

⁵⁸Ibid., 270-271.

⁵⁹DGFP, XI, 722-723.

Finland was badly in need of planes and it had requested two or three batteries of heavy artillery.⁶⁰ General Halder, upon reading the report, wanted to know how long it would take to make "quiet preparations" for an offensive from Finland to the southeast of Lake Ladoga.⁶¹

The Finnish election in December became another item of contention in the growing Russian-Finnish-German political triangle. In November, President Kallio had announced his resignation because of ill health,⁶² and new elections were scheduled for December 19.⁶³ The Finns had sought German advice on the elections as early as the November visit of Veltjens. At the time, Veltjens was only able to say that he thought the election of Marshal Mannerheim might be " ... tantamount to a declaration of war on Russia."⁶⁴ Later, on December 2, Bluecher said that Germany could easily influence the course of the elections because the Finnish Electoral College felt that the new president would have to be persona grata in Berlin.⁶⁵ Ribbentrop replied to Bluecher

⁶⁰DGFP, XI, 813.

⁶¹Halder Diaries, V, 71.

⁶²Since Kallio died very shortly after his resignation, there is no reason to believe that either the Russians or Germans tried to pressure him into quitting his post.

⁶³Upton, 190-191.

⁶⁴DGFP, XI, 813.

⁶⁵Ibid., 763.

that the German Government did not care to comment on the presidential candidates, but he did feel that the Finns should evaluate the effect that Mannerheim's election would have on Finland's relations with Russia.⁶⁶ Russia seemed much more concerned with the elections than was Germany.

On December 7, Molotov informed Ambassador Paasikivi that if Mannerheim, Kivimaki, or Svinhufvud were elected, the Soviet Union would be forced to conclude that Finland no longer cared to observe the recent peace treaty.⁶⁷ The Soviet objections to Kivimaki, the Finnish ambassador to Germany, and Svinhufvud, the father of past Finno-German collaboration, were obvious. Mannerheim was singled out as unacceptable because of his strong hatred of communism and the increased emphasis on military preparations that he would undoubtedly begin once he was elected. Prime Minister Risto Ryti, who had already been assuming the presidential duties during Kallio's ill health, was finally elected as a compromise candidate. A search for national unity found that Ryti was the only candidate who would be acceptable to both the political right and left in Finland and also be persona grata in Berlin and Moscow.⁶⁸

⁶⁶DGFP, XI, 799-800. Mannerheim was not interested in politics, and he was not seeking the presidency. However, he could have had the office simply by asking for it.

⁶⁷Finland Reveals Her Secret Documents, 82-83. DGFP, XI, 841.

⁶⁸Upton, 191-195.

The military commitments between Germany and Finland in early December were still very limited. The transit agreement had placed over one thousand German troops on Finnish soil, and Veltjens' visit to Helsinki laid a basis for future planning; but, as yet, Germany's intentions of using Finland as part of its plan to invade Russia were still very nebulous. The military accord between the two countries began to take a much more definite shape when, on December 18, Hitler released his War Directive #21. This directive spelled out the preliminary plans for Operation Barbarossa, the code name for the invasion of Russia. Listed under the heading of "Probable Allies" the directive stated:

Rumania's and Finland's active participation in the war against Soviet Russia is to be anticipated; they will provide contingents on either wing of our ground forces.

In due course the Armed Forces High Command will approach these two countries and make arrangements as to the manner in which their military contingents will be placed under German command at the time of their intervention.

Finland will cover the concentration of the German Force North which will be transferred from Norway, and the Finnish troops will operate in conjunction with this force. Moreover, Finland will have to neutralize Hanko.⁶⁹

The plan went on to state that Army Group XXI would protect Norway, secure the Petsamo area, and advance with the Finnish troops against the Murmansk Railroad. Operation Barbarossa's

⁶⁹Nazi-Soviet Relations, 260-264.

tactical plans were far from complete, but the basis of Finland's cooperation in the campaign had been established.

Hitler, in his assessment of the importance of Finland, felt that with Finnish support Leningrad could be encircled and Russia would then be cut off from the Baltic.⁷⁰ Troop movements for the invasion had already gotten underway. By the end of December of 1940, there were one and a half mountain divisions, an infantry division, and an SS brigade waiting to move from Norway into Petsamo and the Rybatchiy Peninsula.⁷¹ Now, it was only necessary to complete the plan of attack and coordinate it with the Finnish General Staff.

The final plans for the attack from Finland were well begun. In August, the plans for the attack on Petsamo had been drawn up under the code name of Operation Renntier.⁷² On January 16, 1940, General von Falkenhorst,⁷³ the Commander of the German army in Norway, was ordered to complete the necessary plans for an attack on Russia from the Lake Onega-Lake Ladoga area. He completed the plans on January 27, and they became known by the cover name of Silberfuchs. This

⁷⁰Walter Warlimont, Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-1945, trans. by R. H. Barry (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 138.

⁷¹Halder Diaries, IV, 69.

⁷²Ziemke, 121.

⁷³General von Faulkenhorst was also with the German forces in Finland in 1918.

attack envisioned the use of Finnish troops in a mass attack east of Lake Ladoga and then south toward the Svir River. Finland would be asked to provide for the security of its southern coast and the Aaland Islands, while the German attack would be directed further north from Salla to the White Sea in order to join up with the forces of Operation Renntier and trap the Russian forces on the Kola Peninsula.⁷⁴

On January 27, Marshal Mannerheim received an invitation to send one of his staff officers to Berlin to lecture on the Winter War. Mannerheim sent his Chief of Staff, General Heinrichs; and since he had reason to believe that the German's were going to use this meeting as an excuse to inquire about Finland's military strategies, he instructed Heinrichs to try to find out all he could about German war plans in the North. In Berlin, Heinrichs met with General Halder and General Paulus, the chief planner of Operation Barbarossa. Halder did reveal some of the plans concerning Operation Silberfuchs, and General Heinrichs, although Mannerheim had instructed him not to commit Finland to any plans, told the German General Staff officers about Finnish ideas on mobilization and deposition of troops in case of a war with the USSR. The information that was received from Heinrichs was almost enough to complete the final preparations

⁷⁴Ziemke, 125; and Halder Diaries, V, 115-116.

for the northern attack.⁷⁵

Finno-German collaboration continued on February 19 when Colonel Buschenhagen, the Chief of Staff for German Forces in Norway, met with General Heinrichs and Colonel Tapoela, the Finnish Chief of Operations. The conference revolved about the operations from central and northern Finland, especially the Petsamo area. After the preliminary conferences were over, Buschenhagen traveled north with Tapoela to inspect the area around Rovanjemi, Petsamo, Urinsalmo, and Kuusamo. As a result of these tours, the German High Command in Norway was able to work out an extension of Operation Silberfuchs, which was to be known as Operation Platinfuchs.⁷⁶

At the talks in Helsinki, the Finns expressed little interest in participating in the attack from Petsamo. The area had great economic importance, but it had little sentimental value to them. Finland felt that an attack on the north should be the responsibility of the Germans. The Finns' greatest concern seemed to be the reconquest of the areas lost to the Soviet Union in the Winter War. Finland spoke only of its local interests, and Buschenhagen had been cautious in his comments, saying that the plans should still

⁷⁵Ziemke, 124-126.

⁷⁶International Military Tribunal, Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremburg Military Tribunals, VII (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 310. Hereafter cited as Nuremburg Tribunals; and DGFP, XII, 122-123.

be thought of as theoretical.⁷⁷

Russo-German relations continued to deteriorate until, by March 27, Ribbentrop was able to tell Japan's Foreign Minister Matsuoka that diplomacy with Russia was "correct but deteriorating. If Russia makes a false move she will be crushed." He added that the conditions in the Baltic countries that Russia had occupied were "terrible," and Germany was on its guard against further Soviet moves in the area.⁷⁸ In a later continuation of the talks Ribbentrop stated that German resistance to the Soviet Union with respect to Finland was based on economics and sentiment. Germany, according to the Foreign Minister, could never allow Finland to fall to Russia.⁷⁹

The German Government also displayed a desire to see Sweden become involved in the Northern war plans. The Reich did not expect Sweden to enter the war, but it felt that Sweden might aid by supplying transit rights to German troops moving from southern Norway to Finland. Sweden had already given limited transit rights to the German army shortly after the fall of Norway,⁸⁰ and it was now felt that the schedule of attack for Operation Silberfuchs could be

⁷⁷DGFP, XII, 124-126.

⁷⁸Nazi-Soviet Relations, 281-288, passim.

⁷⁹Ibid., 303-311, passim.

⁸⁰DGFP, IX, 596.

maintained only if Sweden agreed to grant passage. Germany thought that the Swedes might grant the necessary cooperation if they wished to help Finland in a new war with the Soviet Union. Swedo-Finnish ties had been close during the year following the Winter War. There had been plans of a political union between the two countries, but this had been discouraged by both the Germans and the Russians. Still, Sweden did continue to give indications that it would give support to Finland if it were attacked again.

After inquiries were made by the German Foreign Office, it was learned that Sweden would aid Finland only if Russia were the aggressor. It would not lend support if Finland attacked first, nor would it assist if Finland joined the war on the side of the Axis Powers.⁸¹ However, Germany still hoped to find a way to make Sweden permit German forces to cross its borders.

The final preparations for the German-Finnish military cooperation were made in May. General Jodl, on May 12, told the Foreign Office that it had become urgent to enter into detailed discussions with Finland on matters pertaining to troop transportation, joint operations, and the composition of the high command for the Finnish Theater. The German attack on Yugoslavia and Greece had increased the tensions between Russia and Germany. This, plus the continued delay

⁸¹DGFP, 633, 620-621.

of the invasion of Great Britain, made the implementation of Operation Barbarossa more and more a reality. The OKW wanted the proposals for the conferences to be made by the Foreign Office, because the army still wanted Finland to think that Operation Barbarossa was a theoretical plan and not a matter of immediate concern.⁸²

Karl Schnurre left for Helsinki on May 20 in order to inform the Finns of the talks. Hitler had told him to tell President Ryti that the relations between Germany and the Soviet Union were strained, but there was not yet a need to declare war. However, all eventualities still had to be prepared for, and Finland was requested to send officers to Berlin so that they could be informed of "the alarming world situation." President Ryti told Schnurre that Finland did not desire to be drawn into the war between the great powers, but it would fight if the Soviet Union attacked. To the question of whether Germany would consider a Russian attack on Finland a casus belli, Schnurre answered yes. Shortly after the conversation, the Finnish cabinet voiced its unanimous consent to send military representatives to the meetings in Berlin and Salzburg.⁸³

Finland again chose to send General Heinrichs,

⁸²DGFP, XII, 787.

⁸³Mannerheim, 406; and DGFP, XII, 406-407. The Finnish Diet was not informed of the talks. Only a very few Finnish officials knew the extent of the military preparations.

accompanied by Colonel Tapoela, to Germany. The briefing on Operation Barbarossa was conducted by General Jodl and Colonel Buschenhagen. At the meetings the German Staff was careful not to inform the Finns of the part that Army Groups Central and South would play in the campaign in Russia. They were only told of the plans for Finland and given a general indication as to how this operation would complement the movements of Army Group North. The Germans were not suspicious of Finland but they did wish to maintain the highest degree of secrecy.⁸⁴

After a short explanation of the worsening of Russo-German relations, Heinrichs and Tapoela were told that the High Command expected the Russians to collapse most quickly in the Baltic. The German army proposed to drive through the Baltic States to Leningrad while the navy closed the eastern end of the Baltic Sea. The chain of command that was proposed for the Finnish Theater would place Finland's army in the northern and central areas under General von Faulkenhorst. The German and Finnish troops in the Lake Ladoga front would be directed by Marshal Mannerheim. The plans for Operations Renntier, Silberfuchs, and Platinfuchs were then introduced to the Finnish officers.⁸⁵

After the plans were explained, General Heinrichs agreed

⁸⁴DGFP, XII, 879-880.

⁸⁵Ibid., 880-882.

to the proposals on the formation of the high command, and the request for Finnish scouts and reconnaissance teams to support Operation Renntier in the north, but he sought modification on other points. The Germans wanted Finland to support the attack in the center on Kandalaksha from Salla with one division as far as the border. General Heinrichs felt that this would detract from the Finnish effort on the Ladoga front. On the subject of Hanko, the Finns were to seal off the port and wait for air, armored, and artillery support, which would arrive in two or three weeks after the main assaults in the north and east. Again the Finns felt that the two to three divisions which would be required to complete the movement would be better used in the southeast. The Germans said that it might be impossible for them to participate in a campaign against the port, as the assault troops would have to be brought to that point through Sweden if they were to arrive at the beginning of the campaign. The last combat area that was discussed was the Aaland Islands. Here, General Heinrichs believed that the Germans should occupy the islands before the main attack began. This way, Finland could begin its mobilization without seeming to be directing its forces at Russia. The German High Command, of course, was against any early occupation because it would destroy the element of surprise for the main attack. Other items that were discussed concerned transportation, mobilization, and the use of Finnish air fields by the Germans.

The German units were to begin to arrive in Finland between June 10 and 15. The Finns said that it would take them nine days to mobilize, and they would not set a date for the mobilization yet because they wanted to wait upon "developments." The Finns had two major concerns about mobilization. They were afraid that after they had begun to mobilize, which would be an act of war in the eyes of the Soviet Union, Germany might decide to cancel its plans, leaving Finland to face the Russians alone. Secondly, Finland wanted the world and even its own citizens to think that the USSR was the aggressor. It wanted to make secret preparations for the war and then enter the conflict only after the Soviet Union had violated Finnish territory. On May 28, General Keitel said that further talks would settle the few remaining differences of opinion, and the Foreign Office would continue to press Sweden for the necessary transit rights.⁸⁶

Sweden was being asked to allow German troops to pass through on Swedish trains and roads. The Swedes were also being asked to allow the Germans and Finns to purchase as many motor vehicles as possible.⁸⁷ Sweden had earlier said that it might allow troops to pass through Swedish territorial waters, but it indicated that a passage by rail would

⁸⁶DGFP, XII, 882-885; Mannerheim, 407-408; and Ziemke, 132-135.

⁸⁷DGFP, XI, 1040-1042.

not be permitted.⁸⁸ Sweden did give in to German pressure and allow one division to pass, but the permission was given four days after the attack had begun.⁸⁹

The final talks were resumed in Helsinki on June 23. Colonel Buschenhagen later reported that Finland was now prepared to launch its attack in the south on either the eastern or western side of Lake Ladoga with five days' notice. The Finns proposed to use five divisions in the attack, but they were not confident that they would be able to reach the Svir River. They also agreed to occupy the Aalands and seal off Hanko, but they insisted that the assault on Hanko be led by a German division.⁹⁰ In addition, Finland required that Germany guarantee its continued independence and former territorial borders. General mobilization was to begin on June 17.⁹¹

On the morning of June 22, Germany invaded the Soviet Union through the plains of Poland. Russia had been getting reports of the German troop concentrations on its borders, but it did little to prepare for the attack. Hours after the invasion had begun, Hitler read an address to the German people, informing them of the reasons for the new turn in

⁸⁸DGFP, XI, 322.

⁸⁹Ziemke, 139.

⁹⁰Ibid., 134.

⁹¹DGFP, XII, 963.

the war. Included in the speech was a paragraph on Finland which stated:

In alliance with their Finnish comrades, the victors of Narvik stand on the shore of the Arctic Ocean. German divisions, led by the conqueror of Norway, along with Finnish liberation fighters under their Marshal, protect Finland's territory.⁹²

The Finns, though they had not yet declared war, were now allies in name and fact with the Third Reich. The Soviet Union, although confused by the German attack, did not wait long to strike at Finland. On the morning of the 22nd, several Russian batteries opened fire into Finnish territory, and Helsinki was bombed a little later.⁹³ Finland did not retaliate, as it wanted it to be very evident that the Soviet Union was the aggressor. Finally, on June 25, Finland decided to take "defense" measures, and for the Finns the Winter War had become the Continuation War.

⁹²Upton, 282.

⁹³Mannerheim, 412.

CHAPTER IV

THE COLLABORATION

One week after Hitler's address which announced the Nazi-Finnish collaboration in the war against Russia, Marshal Mannerheim made his own call to arms to the Finnish people.

I summon you to a Holy War against the enemy of our people. From graves covered with summer green our fallen heroes rise at this moment to join us anew, as, in conjunction with the great war power of Germany and as its companion in arms, we march out to a crusade against our enemy, in order to create a secure future for Finland.

Brothers in arms! Follow me once more, for the last time, now when Karelia rises and the dawn of a new day for Finland gleams before us.¹

News of the German attack on the Soviet Union brought no great joy to the Finnish people. The memories of the bitter suffering during the Winter War were still fresh in their memories, and even though the collaboration with the Nazis had been kept from the people, even the most politically innocent knew that Russia would soon spread the war into Finland. For almost three years the Soviet leaders had told the Finns that Russia would never wait for a German

¹Lundin, 127.

attack to develop from the north. The Russian positions along the Finnish border had been strengthened since the Winter War, and now, since Hitler's statement on the Finnish-German alliance in arms, the Soviet course of action could be predicted with ease. Marshal Mannerheim's address was far from unanimously accepted by either the average Finnish citizen or by the leaders of state. Finland had, in the past, been considered as one of the buffer zones between Christian Europe and the "Barbaric Hordes" to the east, so the call to a "Holy War" may have attracted some. However, the rest of the speech was a flagrant overstatement of Finnish war aims. Finland did hope to eliminate the threat of Soviet belligerence, but the irredentist spirit to claim Soviet Karelia, a land that had not been included in Finnish borders for over five-hundred years, was almost completely absent. For most Finns, the war was just a painful necessity, forced upon them by a system of international power politics over which they had no control. Finland was not pro-Nazi, nor was it even ardently pro-German. There were cultural and religious ties with Germany which could not be discounted, but Finland's post-World War I years had been spent trying to develop new cultural, political, and economic alliances with Sweden and Great Britain, not Germany. The Finns, with the exception of a very few pro-Nazis, looked upon the association with Germany as an alliance forced upon them by the everpresent threat of Soviet domination and the political

isolation caused by the German conquests in the West. Finland wanted the world to believe that Germany was a "cobelligerent" in the Continuation War. It, however, did not want the Allies to believe that Finland was a permanent German ally in the wider European war. From the past experience of the Winter War, the Finns realized that Germany was using Finland as a pawn in its attempt to establish the Thousand Year Reich. If at all possible, Finland would now like to use Germany as expediently as possible in the Continuation War.²

The German campaign began on June 22 with the execution of Operation Renntier into Petsamo by the 27,500 men of Mountain Corps Norway. The territory between Finnmark and the eastern Russo-Finnish border was covered in two days. On June 22, the command of the Army of Norway ordered that the attack on northern Russia should begin on June 29. The German operations in Finland north of the Karelian front were divided into two sectors. The code name for the entire operation was Silberfuchs. The attack in the far north was called Platinfuchs while the campaign on the mideastern Russo-Finnish border was named Polarfuchs. Platinfuchs was to secure the Petsamo nickel fields, seal off and capture the Rybatchiy Peninsula, and move east to Murmansk. Polarfuchs was to feature an attack from central Finland near Salla northeastward.

²Lundin, Chapter VII, "Finnish War Aims and the Karelian Question," 113-144, passim.

to the city of Kandalaksha on the Murmansk Railroad. Hitler hoped that the control of the Russian north would produce psychological as well as military victories. If Murmansk and the railroad leading south to Leningrad were captured, Russia would be cut off from any possible British support. The main German attacks on Russia were directed at Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. Operation Silberfuchs was decidedly a secondary effort, secondary even to the Finno-German campaign in southern Karelia; but it did hope to secure the northern Arctic shores which Hitler believed were vulnerable to a British attack.³

Several factors in Operation Platinfuchs' plan of attack caused great concern in the German High Command. Hitler had insisted that seven divisions of the Army of Norway remain in northern Norway to guard against a British invasion. This decision severely lessened the number of assault troops that were needed to insure a rapid victory before the winter set in. Secondly, the supplies for the forces in northern Finland were to be brought overland from Narvik on a road that lacked an all-weather surface. Next, the terrain and climate of northern Finland and Russia were not at all advantageous to the German Blitzkrieg. There were very few roads in the area, and the topography was better suited for the Soviet defensive positions than it was for the German assault

³Ziemke, 160-165; and Lundin, 151-153.

tactics. Although it was now summer, the mild weather could be expected to last for only one more month. Then the autumn rains would turn the few existing roads into mud.⁴

Platinfuchs was directed by General Dietel, and his early objectives, though limited, proved to be too ambitious under the existing circumstances. The original assault was to seal off the Rybatchiy Peninsula and Kola Bay and then, if time and weather permitted, Murmansk was to be taken. The attack was launched on schedule toward the initial objective, the Litsa River south of the Rybatchiy Peninsula, but the advance was slowed by the terrain and the strong Soviet resistance. The Germans had expected to meet Russian reserve units in that area, but they were surprised to find two crack Soviet divisions between the Litsa River and the Finnish border. The Rybatchiy Peninsula was sealed off on July 4, but the Germans did not have enough troops to move north to capture it. The attack on Litsa was nearly a complete failure. The Germans reached the river, but they were soon driven back. General Dietel asked Hitler to release additional troops from Norway, but the Fuehrer believed that they were needed where they were. By the middle of September, the autumn rains began. The Army Corps of Norway then began to prepare its winter line of defense west of the Litsa. Platinfuchs had produced an early stalemate, a stalemate that was to last

⁴Ziemke, 167-168.

until the summer of 1944.⁵

Operation Polarfuchs, under the direction of General von Falkenhorst, moved east from the Salla railroad toward Kandalaksha on July 1. In this attack there was almost an even number of both German and Finnish troops. The German XXXVI Corps, consisting of two divisions had been joined by the Finnish 3rd and 6th Divisions. The Germans and Finns were not integrated into a single unit and they had different objectives, but they were both under the same German command. Polarfuchs turned into a repetition of Platinfuchs: early advances were met by exceedingly stiff Soviet resistance. The Russians had obviously prepared well for the German attack in the north, and as long as they had the Murmansk Railroad they would have little difficulty bringing in supplies and replacements. The initial German drive was broken off on July 8 when the Russians launched a strong counter-offensive. For the rest of the summer there were offensives and counteroffensives of a very minor nature, and this sector also went into winter positions hopelessly stalemated.⁶

Although Operation Silberfuchs did not produce the results that had been expected, the war on the Ladoga-Karelia front was much more encouraging to the Germans. Here, the Finns were more willing participants, and the drive of Army

⁵Zienke, 169-172.

⁶Mannerheim, 421-422.

Group North across the Baltic States toward Leningrad had forced the Russians to withdraw troops from this area. The Germans wanted the Finns to develop two lines of attack in this sector. One of them was to proceed due south down the Karelian Isthmus, and the other was to sweep around the northeast coast of Lake Ladoga to the Svir River and then continue southwest until it linked up with Army Group North to encircle Leningrad. The Germans had high hopes for Finnish success against the Russians. The Finnish army had been restocked with German arms, and it now had the artillery, mortars, and antitank weapons that it had lacked in the Winter War. In addition, the 500,000 men who had been mobilized, nearly sixteen per cent of Finland's total population, would be fighting against its age-old enemy in an attempt to recover the portions of the homeland which had been lost in 1940.⁷

The Finnish offensive began on July 10 with the Army of Karelia, under the command of General Heinrichs, making a thrust on either side of Lake Yanis, located a few miles north of Lake Ladoga. The attack was being directed by Marshal Mannerheim, and the troops employed in the operation were almost exclusively Finnish. Only the German 163rd Infantry Division, which had originally been intended for Operation Polarfuchs, was in the area, and it was to be used

⁷Mannerheim, 416-418.

in reserve. As expected, the Russians had been forced to remove their reserves from the Ladoga-Karelia front in order to bolster Leningrad's western defenses. When the offensive began, the Finns had a clear three to one numerical superiority over the Soviet troops.⁸

From July 10 through the middle of August, the attack went exactly as it had been planned. The Finnish VI Corps attacked from the northeast of Lake Yanis toward Lake Ladoga. In six days it had covered sixty-five miles. Upon reaching Lake Ladoga, the offensive split into two branches: one down the eastern shore of the Lake and the other east in the direction of Lake Onega. By August 16, the Finnish forces had crossed the 1939 Russo-Finnish borders and controlled half of the isthmus between Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega.⁹

The military cooperation between the Germans and the Finns began to display serious differences of opinion in mid-August. Field Marshal Von Leeb's Army Group North still planned to complete the encirclement of Leningrad by joining the Finns on the Svir. On August 2, OKH had asked Mannerheim to plan a continuation of the attack that was now progressing along the eastern shore of Lake Ladoga until it reached the Svir River. Mannerheim refused to comply, but he did agree to push south along the Karelian Isthmus. Mannerheim's

⁸Ziemke, 188-190.

⁹Ibid., 191-192.

refusal to continue the attack to the Svir was based on two considerations. The German offensive which was aimed at Leningrad had slowed considerably once it had entered Russia proper from the Baltic States. Mannerheim was reluctant to extend his troops south into Russia until he had some positive assurance that the Nazi forces could reach their goals. Secondly, Mannerheim was personally interested only in regaining Finnish territory on the Karelian Isthmus and extending Finland's border east into Soviet Karelia, where the local population was expected to greet the Finns as liberators. A thrust into the Russian plains meant an escalation of the war that would extend Finland's already inadequate army.¹⁰

On August 13, Mannerheim ordered his II Corps, which to this time had made only a short drive to the northwest corner of Lake Ladoga, to turn south into the Karelian Isthmus. In just a few days, the Finnish forces established a bridgehead in the middle of the isthmus. To complement II Corps' attack, IV Corps launched an offensive down the western side of the isthmus toward Viipuri. After cutting the Viipuri-Leningrad rail line and encircling the city, the Finns pushed on to the Pre-Winter War border and arrived there on September 2.¹¹

¹⁰Ziemke, 193-194.

¹¹Wilhelm Keitel, Memoirs, ed. by Walter Gorlitz and trans. by David Irving (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), 148-149.

As the Finns moved ahead, German-Finnish cooperation again came into question. Hitler had originally believed that the capture of Leningrad was a prime military objective. The occupation of the second city of the USSR would produce a great psychological victory for the Germans as well as give them exclusive control of the Baltic Sea. Now Hitler's attention had turned to the south of Russia. Here were the wheat fields of the Ukraine and the oil of Bessarabia. If this area could be conquered first, the Reich could divert these materials to Germany in order to alleviate some of the growing shortages at home. Part of Army Group North was diverted to the south and the encirclement, rather than the capture, of the city was planned. Since most of Leningrad's food supplies came from the south, it was felt that a seige would not only bring about the ultimate defeat of the city, but it would also drastically reduce the size of the city's population, making it much easier to occupy. However, for the encirclement to be completed, it was felt that Finnish forces would have to move to the Svir and then continue to move on until they linked up with Army Group North, hopefully at Tikhvin.¹²

The call to launch a new offensive into Russia past the defensive positions which had already been established drew no immediately cooperative response from Marshal Mannerheim.

¹²Ziemke, 194-196.

The large percentage of the population in uniform had begun to tell on the nation's economy. In August, Mannerheim had been forced to begin the release of the fourth platoon in every infantry company. In addition to this, the casualty rates were much higher than they had been for the Winter War. Mannerheim also knew from experience that the Russian fortifications in the area would be very strong. In view of these factors, he said that the attack could best be accomplished by the German forces.¹³

The decision regarding the future deployment of Finnish troops was not altogether in Mannerheim's hands. Leading industrialists in Finland had been telling the Marshal that Finland's economy would collapse unless more men were released from the army. The Finnish constitution also required that the Commander-in-Chief receive permission from the Diet before he committed troops past Finland's borders. Mannerheim had strong control over his army and his influence in the government was immense. If he had wanted to continue the offensive, he could have done so, but he was forced to consider Finland's best interests. Finnish troops had already crossed both the border established in 1940 and the pre-Winter War boundary, but Mannerheim maintained that this had been done to establish "defensive positions." If the Germans continued their demand for a renewal of the offensive,

¹³Mannerheim, 426-427.

Mannerheim could stall them by pointing to Finland's internal economic problems. At this point in the war, the waiting game was exactly what the Marshal wanted to play. If Army Group North continued to meet stiff resistance around Leningrad, it would mean that the Finns would have a greater distance to go before they could link up with the Germans. If the German thrust were strong enough to move east rapidly and, at the same time, force the Russians to withdraw some of their forces in the Ladoga area, the Finns might contemplate an attack. In the meantime, Mannerheim could afford to stall his offensive in order to watch the progress of Army Group North. A premature Finnish attack, unsupported by the German advance, would produce a highly untenable salient into Russia.¹⁴

The fact that Mannerheim refused to go on the offensive caused considerable consternation at OKH. The High Command altered its plans for a tight encirclement of the outskirts of Leningrad in order to divert forces toward the Svir. Now, the eastern arc of the encirclement would be several miles from the city, but it would still be effectively isolated. The movement toward the Svir was intended to encourage Finland to continue its offensive and keep the Russians tied down on the Ladoga front. At the end of August, the Germans captured the last remaining railroad into Leningrad, but

¹⁴Zienke, 197-198.

the Russians could still supply the city through the gap that existed from that point to the positions held by the Finns north of the Svir.¹⁵

The German High Command again asked the Finns for assistance, this time from a different direction. If Leningrad were taken rather than besieged, the attempt to link up with the Finns would lose much of its significance, and the large number of troops now stalemated on the perimeter of the city could be used to continue the attack to the east and to the south. OKH now wanted the Finns to continue their offensive on the Karelian Isthmus to relieve some of the pressure of the Soviet defenses to the south and to the west of the city. Mannerheim again refused, but he did agree to continue the attack in the east to the Svir. Mannerheim was not trying to be unduly obstinate. He did want the Germans to win the war in the north, but he did not want to participate in the destruction of Leningrad.¹⁶ In fact, he had claimed that he assumed the command in the war on the condition that he would not have to lead his forces against Leningrad. He knew the extremes the Soviets would go to in order to protect the city and he did not wish to face these defenses. Then too, Mannerheim had to consider the post-war consequences if Russia should be victorious. The Soviet terms with Finland

¹⁵Ziemke, 199.

¹⁶Mannerheim, 426-427.

would be much harsher if it took part in the destruction of Leningrad.¹⁷ After viewing the situation more closely, Mannerheim decided that the strength of Army Group North was not sufficient to launch the heavy attack that he wanted to use to cover the movement of his own troops. On September 25, he informed OKH that an advance on either the Karelian or the Ladoga Fronts was impossible, because he was being forced to convert divisions into brigades to help alleviate the civilian manpower shortage.¹⁸

In mid-October the Germans did begin a drive east toward Tikhvin. The city was taken in November. But the Russian resistance coupled with the winter weather forced the German army to retreat to the west bank of the Volkhov River, where Hitler ordered that the line be held to the last man.¹⁹

On August 18, the United States, upon Russia's request, communicated a peace offer to Finland. No reply was received in response.²⁰ This was unusual. Although the Finns had no

¹⁷Mannerheim, 416-417.

¹⁸Ziemke, 200-201.

¹⁹Ibid., 202-203. For a thorough study of the resistance offered by the city of Leningrad see Leon Goure's The Siege of Leningrad (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962).

²⁰Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941, Vol. I (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1958), 56-57. Hereafter cited as United States Foreign Relations.

intentions of withdrawing from the war at this time, they still desired to maintain good relations with the Allies. The Allies were still sympathetic with Finland. The Finnish Legation in London had been closed on July 28, but the British continued to retain consular offices in Helsinki. Great Britain wanted to see Finland get out of the war, but it had made no overt objections to the Finnish advance to the pre-Winter War borders.²¹ On October 27, the American State Department asked the Finns to pull back to the 1939 borders. Finland again refused.²² Finland's refusal of the overtures made by the United States and Great Britain was now to a large extent caused by German pressures. Germany was Finland's chief source of war materials and grains. If it withdrew from the war now, it would have nowhere to turn for these commodities. Germany was also anxious to see Finland break away from diplomatic contact with the West. Since the German Foreign Office realized that the Finns would not make the break of their own accord, it decided to place Finland in a compromising position. In late October, the Finnish Government was informed that Germany wanted it to sign the Anti-Comintern Pact which was being renewed in Berlin on November 27. It was hinted that grain shipments would be suspended if Finland did not comply. Germany hoped that

²¹Mannerheim, 432.

²²United States Foreign Relations, 1941, Vol. I, 82-84.

Finland, by signing the Anti-Comintern Pact, would be that much nearer to a full alliance with the Reich. This in turn would cause the Allies to lose their sympathy for Finland and force the Finns into still closer cooperation with the German war aims. On November 27, Foreign Minister Witting flew to Berlin to sign the Pact. The event was given wide publicity to the dismay of the Finns, who wished the signing to remain as secret as possible.²³

The year 1941 ended with a virtual impasse on all fronts near Finland. In January of 1942, one major change was made in German strategy for the North. General von Falkenhorst had been ordered back to Norway at the beginning of the year, and General Dietel replaced him as the Commander of all German forces in Finland. The United States' entry into the war had caused Hitler to become more apprehensive, and he believed that Norway had to be strengthened further. The British navy had recently shelled coastal positions in Norway and made commando raids on several off-shore islands. Hitler began to believe that Norway might prove the "Zone of Destiny in this War." Accordingly, the Fuehrer ordered the transfer of the battleships which had stationed at Brest to the Norwegian coast.²⁴ In January and February, the ships did force their way through the English Channel, but while the new plans

²³Ziemke, 207-208.

²⁴Fuehrer Conferences, 1942, 6.

strengthened Norway, they also drew reserve strength from northern Finland.

At the beginning of 1942, the plans for an offense against the Russians in the North were completely undecided after the failure of Silberfuchs. Since von Falkenhorst had returned to Norway, the Army of Norway had been renamed the Army of Lapland, and Hitler had promised to strengthen it with five fortress battalions for the Kirkenes-Pechenga area. Hitler was still interested in capturing Murmansk, but at the time he was more concerned with protecting the Petsamo nickel fields. However, before the new troops could arrive, ice had closed the northern Finnish ports, and the transfer was postponed until the spring. The delay was a severe blow to the Army of the Lapland, as the additional units would have released some of the troops which had been guarding the area and this would have given a greater impetus to a new German offensive.²⁵

The severe winter weather and difficulties in supply and transportation caused the stalemate to continue through March. In late March and early April, the Finns had been able to capture several small islands in the Gulf of Finland, but no major offensive was begun by either side on any of the three fronts.

The Soviet army to the east of Salla had been successful

²⁵Ziemke, 221-225.

in its attempt to strengthen its numbers. The Army of Lapland was late in detecting the build up due to a severe shortage of reconnaissance planes, but when it was discovered General Dietel thought that the Russians would not attempt an immediate offensive. The spring thaw was imminent and the roads would soon be impassable. The Soviets, however, saw this as an advantage: they planned to advance before the thaw began, and then stop to solidify their gains with no fear of a counterattack after the roads did turn to mud.²⁶

The Soviet offensive was launched on April 24. The attack gained some ground, but the Germans inflicted large losses on the Russians and they were forced to pull back because of a lack of fresh troops. General Dietel, at the height of the attack, had asked the Finnish 12th Brigade be assigned to his III Corps. Mannerheim refused when he thought that he would permanently lose the unit in the prolonged struggle to the north. By May 7, the Russian attack had been completely halted, and Dietel decided to risk a speedy counterattack while the Russians were still off balance. The Germans, like the Russians, also saw their plans stymied by bad weather. During the course of the limited counterattack, the Finnish troops under Dietel's command showed an independence of mind that bordered on insubordination. General Siilasvuo, the Finnish commander in the north halted his

²⁶Ziemke, 223-225.

units' attack without permission, threatened to withdraw his troops from the attack, and demanded that all the horses and wagons which the Finns had loaned to the Germans be returned at once. General Dietel was forced to appeal to Siilasvuo in the name of "brotherhood-in-arms" to keep him from endangering the flanks of the German's advanced positions.²⁷

By the end of the summer, the battle lines had changed little. However, the Germans claimed that they had been victorious during those months because of the heavy losses they had inflicted on the attacking Russian forces. The most notable change in the course of the campaign was the fact that nearly all of the Finnish units in the area were removed by September 25. Dietel did not want to have to depend on commanders and men who were not responsive to his commands.²⁸

The war in the extreme north of Finland also showed little progress. On June 4, Hitler and General Keitel flew to Finland for military talks and also to honor Marshal Mannerheim on his seventy-fifth birthday. In the conferences General Dietel told Hitler that the Army of Lapland did not have enough troops either to take or to hold the Rybatchiy Peninsula. Hitler was reluctant to give up this part of the operation in the north, as he still believed that this area

²⁷Ziemke, 225-227.

²⁸Ibid., 228.

could be used as an Allied landing point. The Fuehrer decided to strengthen the Fifth Air Force in the area, but he could still not spare more troops.²⁹

In June the Army of the Lapland was redesignated as the Twentieth Mountain Army. As doubtful as the operation was, it was still assigned the task of securing the Rybatchiy Peninsula. Plans, under the code name Wiesengrund, were drawn up, but, as Dietel had predicted, his army lacked the reserves and the transportation to begin the offensive. In order to mount some kind of an attack in the north, Operation Lachsfang was planned in late July. This scheme called for an attack on the Murmansk Railroad in the area of Kandalaksha. The Germans were to use the heavy air support from the Fifth Air Force and 80,000 men in the attack, twice the number used to support Platinfuchs in 1941. The offensive was to begin in September, and the Finns were requested to mount an auxiliary attack from the south. General Heinrichs agreed to the plan, but he said that Leningrad would have to be taken and an advance made to the Svir River before he could promise full cooperation.³⁰

Operation Lachsfang promised some success if the Finns gave the necessary support, but the Finnish participation hinged on the outcome of Army Group North's attempt to take

²⁹Ziemke, 229-230; and Mannerheim, 450-454.

³⁰Ibid., 231-233; and 456.

Leningrad before the northern attack began. Fuehrer Directive Number 45 of July 23, 1942, ordered that Leningrad be taken by September. Army Group North was to be strengthened by five divisions from Army Group South. The command of Army Group North still felt that the operation would take a minimum of three months to complete even with the additional support. The Russians now had thirteen divisions facing the Germans in the north, and the total German strength, with the additional troops would be ten divisions, eight short of the number that was felt would be needed to gain a speedy victory.³¹

On August 8, General Georg von Kuechler, who had replaced General von Leeb as the commander of Army Group North, told Hitler that he would need more troops to take Leningrad. His army was outnumbered by two to one, and he believed that it would take until the end of October to complete the tactical plans unless a large number of reinforcements could be brought up. Hitler had no more troops to spare, and the operation had to be completed by September to give the Finns time to move their forces into position for Lachsfang. The attack was then scheduled for September 10, and General Manstein, who had just directed the successful seige of Sevastopol, was brought in to try to work a miracle at

³¹Ziemke, 233; and Mannerheim, 458.

Leningrad. The attack was now named Operation Nordlicht.³²

Even Manstein was not confident of success at Leningrad. He felt that massive air and artillery strikes could not be counted on to break the Soviet resistance. He also believed that the attack on Leningrad could best be made from the Karelian Isthmus, and, in any event, the operation would have to be made by attacks from both the German and the Finnish fronts.³³

Before the Germans had a chance to begin Operation Nordlicht, the Soviet Union began its own offensive in order to open a land avenue to Leningrad.³⁴ The Soviet attack gained a small breakthrough and Operation Nordlicht was completely thrown off schedule. On September 1, Hitler announced that Operation Lachsfang was cancelled for 1942 and the implementation of Nordlicht was made dependent on the continuation of good weather and the ability to assemble the necessary troops. On September 4, the Finnish Army Headquarters stated that the possibility of Finland's participating in Nordlicht was "extremely limited."³⁵

³²Ziemke, 233-234.

³³Warlimont, 253-254.

³⁴The Russians had been forced to bring supplies across Lake Ladoga by ferry in the summer and by truck in the winter when the Lake was frozen over.

³⁵Ziemke, 233-235. Marshal Mannerheim almost completely ignored Operation Nordlicht in his memoirs.

Germany's hopes of beginning Nordlicht were vastly over optimistic. The Russian attack on the German right flank continued until mid-October. The weather had now begun to turn, and the Finns still showed no signs that they would cooperate. At the end of the month, the additional troops which had been given to Army Group North were sent south to help cover the line between Leningrad and Moscow. With this decision, Operation Nordlicht had to be postponed indefinitely.³⁶

The year 1942 had produced no visible Nazi gains in the North, and there were signs that Germany's position was beginning to deteriorate. German troops were now extended from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea, and the quick victories that Hitler had hoped would envelope and destroy large numbers of Russian troops, had not materialized. Now that the Soviet Union had had a chance to strengthen its forces, the Fuehrer was forced to juggle his troops to gain the necessary strength to mount an offensive at any given point. The war of attrition had now begun to tell on the forces of the Reich. Finland continued to bide its time, waiting to see how the course of the war would turn before it continued to give support to Germany.

The year 1943 became a year of decision and a time of frustration for the Nazis. It had now been almost a year and

³⁶Ziemke, 236.

a half since the German army had arrived at the outskirts of Leningrad and the city had still not fallen. The front in the north of Finland had become so static that OKH referred to it as "the front without combat activity." In the North Sea and the Arctic, British naval superiority remained to threaten the German supply routes to the north and cause Hitler to worry about a possible Allied invasion of Norway or Finland.

The recent Allied efforts in Africa had made Hitler increasingly apprehensive that the Allies might also try to spread the war to the north. The Fuehrer's suspicions had also extended to Sweden. He believed that Sweden would cooperate with the Allies if an attack did develop. If the Allies did gain control of the Norwegian coast, the Army of Norway and the troops in northern Finland would be virtually isolated from their supply routes. On February 10, orders were sent to Norway to begin plans for an invasion of Sweden. By the end of March the plan had nearly been completed; however, the operation was never put into effect. Troops from Norway would have to be used in the attack, and this would weaken the coastal defenses of Norway. An attack on Sweden at this time might cause the Allied invasion that it was trying to prevent. The German navy also believed that Leningrad would have to be captured and the Soviet Baltic Fleet eliminated before naval support could be given to the

attack.³⁷

In January of 1943, the Germans were experiencing difficulties on all three fronts in Russia. The German Sixth Army was facing defeat near Stalingrad, and the Russian offensive that had begun on Army Group North's right flank was continuing to broaden the gap between Lake Ladoga and Leningrad. The Soviet offensive in the north had lasted for two and a half months, and it had cost them over a quarter of a million casualties, but the advance was a severe shock to Finnish morale. The further the Germans were driven back, the more isolated the Finnish forward positions became. If Leningrad were freed from the seige, the Finns could expect to feel increased Soviet pressure in their sectors.³⁸

At a conference at the Fuehrer Headquarters on January 14, OKW tried to assess the value of the Finnish army in the war. The assessment produced a decidedly negative estimate. It was felt that the military strength of the Finns had been overestimated. The Finnish army had no inclination to mount any supporting offensives, it was almost without reserves, and it was expected to lose ground to a Soviet attack. Its only advantage seemed to be that, while it continued to hold its defensive positions, the Soviets were forced to keep troops in the Finnish sectors, troops which the Soviet Union

³⁷Ziemke, 252-264, passim.

³⁸Ibid., 242.

would like to use to free Leningrad.³⁹

While OKW was theorizing on the role of the Finnish army, Finland was examining its own position. On February 3, the day after the German surrender at Stalingrad, Mannerheim, President Ryti, Defense Minister Walden, and Prime Minister Rangell met to discuss the situation. They were particularly worried about the fact that the German retreat from Leningrad, which was not yet too serious, would bring a heavy Russian counterattack against the Karelian Isthmus. During the conference, they agreed on two points: the war had reached a turning point and Finland must use the first possible opportunity to get out of it.⁴⁰

A secret session of the Diet met on February 9, and Colonel Paasonen, Head of the Intelligence Department, gave the representatives a review of the military and political situation at the time. He stated that Germany and her Allies had lost sixty divisions on the eastern front. Germany was beginning to weaken, and an Allied attack on France would cause the collapse of the German army. He ended his resume' by saying that it would be wise to become familiar once again with the idea of being forced to conclude a second peace with Moscow.⁴¹

³⁹Ziemke, 242-243.

⁴⁰Mannerheim, 460.

⁴¹Ibid., 461.

New elections were held in Finland on February 15, and President Ryti, with the support of Marshal Mannerheim, was again chosen to lead his country. Ryti's first task was to try to construct a new government that could extricate Finland from the war. Dr. Henrik Ramsay, who was reputed to have excellent connections with Great Britain, was chosen as the new Foreign Minister.⁴² It was not long before Finland received news from the Allies. On March 20, the United States' Charge d'Affaires offered to help establish diplomatic contact between Finland and the Soviet Union.⁴³

Dr. Ramsay's first mistake in his new post was the communication of the United States' offer and Finland's intentions to Germany's Foreign Minister. Ramsay felt that he could begin to pave the way for a "friendly withdrawal" from the war, but Ribbentrop soon dispelled this naive contention. Ribbentrop demanded that Finland reject the American offer and issue a public declaration that it would not sign a separate peace with the Soviet Union. Finland could not afford to refuse because it was still dependent on Germany for a large percentage of its foodstuffs, but it realized that the declaration would endanger its position with both the Soviet Union and the Western Allies. The American Charge' was told that Finland was unfortunately unable to avail itself of the

⁴²Mannerheim, 462-463.

⁴³United States Foreign Relations, 1943, III, 251-253.

offer. This was not enough for Ribbentrop; he wanted some assurance that Finland would not negotiate a separate peace. To add force to his words, he recalled Ambassador von Bluecher back to Berlin for "consultations." On May 16, President Ryti did relent to a degree and made a speech that declared that Finland would rather continue the war than throw itself on the mercy of the Soviet Union. This statement went far enough to guarantee the continuation of German grain shipments, but Ribbentrop still realized that the Finns were hesitant to mention an alliance with Germany.⁴⁴

OKW believed that a German victory in the north would be necessary to keep the Finns in the war. As long as the German army was present in the Leningrad sector, a modicum of cooperation was expected from the Finns. A continued stalemate in the district would cause Finland to continue to think about withdrawing from the war; a German retreat would almost necessitate hurried Finnish negotiations with the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ Thus the dilemma continued to present itself: the Germans were depending on Finland's cooperation to maintain their positions in the north while the prospect of Finnish cooperation was entirely dependent on the continued maintenance of the German positions.

The war in northern Finland was all but forgotten while

⁴⁴Mannerheim, 463-464; and Ziemke, 243-244.

⁴⁵Ziemke, 244-245.

new plans were made for the Leningrad front. Hitler, knowing the importance of Leningrad to the German position in the east, ordered on March 13, that plans be made for the capture of the city by late summer. Army Group North felt that a new offensive in the area was now dependent on what the Russians would attempt during the summer months. It had been felt that the Soviets would either continue its offensive near Leningrad or attempt to break through the German line at the point of conjunction between Army Group North and Army Group Center. If the Russians did go on the offensive, it was not known if the Germans could stabilize the front long enough to launch an attack of their own.⁴⁶

The operational plan for the capture of Leningrad was drawn up by General Kuechler's staff and given the code name Parkplatz. The beginning of Parkplatz was made dependent on the success of Army Group South's latest offensive. If Army Group South could eliminate the salient formed by Russia's winter offensive in the south, eight to nine divisions could be transferred north to Leningrad. This strategy proved to be too optimistic. The German attack in the south, which began on July 5, was repulsed, and the Soviet counterattack pushed the Germans back to the Enieper River. On July 22, the Soviet army in the north began an all-out offensive to free Leningrad. In facing impending disaster in both the

⁴⁶Ziemke, 247.

north and the south, Parkplatz was forgotten, and plans were now begun to set up defensive positions approximately 125 miles southwest of Leningrad.⁴⁷

In July, the Finns continued to prepare for a withdrawal from the war. During the course of the month, the Russian Legation in Stockholm informed the Belgian Minister that the Soviet Union would be willing to begin peace negotiations if Finland made the first step. Finland replied that it would consider the 1939 frontiers as a basis for negotiations, but it would consider a rectification of the boundaries. The United States was also told that Finland would do nothing to prevent an Allied invasion of Norway, nor would it resist a movement into Finnish territory. In August, thirty-three prominent Finns presented Ryti with a petition calling for a withdrawal from the war, and the Finnish press began to agitate for a separate peace.⁴⁸

Army Group North continued to hold around Leningrad after a month and a half of defending against the Soviet offensive. However, work did continue on the defensive positions on the Narva River-Lake Peipus line. The Twentieth Mountain Army on September 14, told OKW that it thought that Army Group North's withdrawal from Leningrad would endanger its position in the north. The retreat would force the Finns

⁴⁷Ziemke, 247.

⁴⁸Mannerheim, 467.

to retreat from their present positions, shorten their lines, and redeploy a majority of their forces to the Karelian Isthmus. The retreat could even cause the fall of President Ryti's government, and the election of a new president who would be in a better position to negotiate with the Soviet Union. If negotiations were begun and a treaty signed, the German forces would be forced to retreat into northern Norway under winter conditions. A week after this report was filed, the Finnish Government accented Army Group North's pessimism when it informed the German High Command that a retreat from Leningrad would have the "most serious consequences" for Finland.⁴⁹

The Finns were not yet in a crisis situation. Their army outnumbered by two to one the Russian forces which faced them. Despite this numerical superiority, the Finns refused to attack. An offensive would complicate future negotiations with the Soviet Union and alienate Finland from the Western Allies. Then, given the weakness of Army Group North's position, the attack would only bring temporary success. If the Finns advanced and the Germans retreated, Finland would also have to give up its gains.⁵⁰

On September 28, the Twentieth Mountain Army received Fuehrer Directive Number 50. It said that the position of

⁴⁹Ziemke, 248.

⁵⁰Ibid., 249.

Army Group North had been "stabilized," but unfavorable developments were being prepared for. In the event that Finland withdrew from the war, the forces of the Twentieth Mountain Army were to move back from its present positions to a line south of Petsamo. The nickel mines were to be held as long as possible.⁵¹ Later, OKH was informed by General Dietel that War Directive Number 50 was impractical. He felt that the British would be able to interdict his supply lines through the Arctic, and this would leave the Twentieth Mountain Army without provisions, protecting mines whose ore could no longer be transferred to Germany.⁵²

The German army's position in the Leningrad sector was made even more tenuous when the Russian army launched a new offensive designed to break the line between Army Group North and Army Group Center. Within three days the German armies had lost contact with each other. Mannerheim now began to think about preparing defensive positions of his own. If the Twentieth Mountain Army was forced to retreat, the Marshal wanted to build a defense line west of the point where the Germans were now entrenched. On October 14, General Jodl flew from OKW Headquarters to Helsinki for conferences with Mannerheim and the Finnish Minister of Defense. Jodl tried to be as encouraging as he possibly could. He reported that

⁵¹Warlimont, 398.

⁵²Ziemke, 251.

Italy's recent set backs had not been a severe blow to the Reich, and Germany looked forward to a confrontation with the Allies in France. Jodl said that the German defenses in France would destroy the Allied land forces and allow Germany to release troops for the Russian campaign. The General noted that he knew of Finland's desire to get out of the war, but he warned that Russia's peace conditions would be harsh. He concluded his argument by saying that Finland had two alternatives: continue the war as an ally of Germany and protect its homeland or risk Bolshevization by surrender.⁵³

The Finnish Government considered the situation so acute that it disregarded Jodl's advice and tried to reopen contact with Moscow through Madame Kollontai, the Russian Minister in Stockholm. The Finnish request was transmitted to Madame Kollontai through the Swedish Foreign Office, and she said that Finland could send a representative to Moscow. A representative was not sent, but Finland did let Russia know that it was ready to conclude a peace if areas and cities which were vital to its national existence were not claimed by the Soviet Union. Madame Kollontai then informed Finland her personal opinion was that the recognition of the 1940 frontiers would have to be made before talks could begin.⁵⁴

The Russian offensive about Nevel, had not produced a

⁵³Mannerheim, 468-469.

⁵⁴Ibid., 470.

decisive victory, but it caused the Germans to continue to contemplate a withdrawal. Hitler realized the effect that the retreat would have on the Finns, but he felt that they would be forced to continue the fight for at least a short time longer, giving the German army at least a minimum of relief while it established its new positions. On December 31, Hitler drafted a letter to Mannerheim, informing him that a retreat was imminent, but the letter was never sent.⁵⁵

The retreat from Leningrad was postponed in early January of 1944, because of the difficulty it would cause for Finland and also because it would give the Soviet Union a cleaner control of the Baltic. On January 14, the Russians began another offensive in the Leningrad sector. By the 17th, Novgorod was encircled, and Leningrad was completely liberated on the 19th. General Kuechler ordered his troops to withdraw to the defensive positions to escape being encircled. Hitler was enraged to think that the positions could not be held. He ordered Kuechel to Germany and replaced him with General Walter Model.⁵⁶

On January 30, the American Charge d'Affaires presented President Ryti with a note which asked that Finland take the first steps toward making peace with Russia.⁵⁷ Mannerheim

⁵⁵Ziemke, 252.

⁵⁶Ibid., 272-273.

⁵⁷United States Foreign Relations, 1944, III, 563.

was for the proposal, as he believed that Germany had lost the war, and a Russian offensive against Finland could not be restrained for long.⁵⁸ With this advice in mind, President Ryti sent Juho Paasikivi to Stockholm to receive Soviet peace terms from Madame Kollontai. The Russian demands included the restoration of the Winter War Treaty, internment of German troops in Finland, demobilization, and war reparations. When Paasikivi returned to Helsinki on February 23, the demands were discussed by the leaders of state because they felt that Finland was not capable of interning the German forces. A negative reply was returned, but the Swedish Foreign Minister persuaded the Finns to indicate that they hoped further negotiations could begin.⁵⁹

Stalin had promised during the Tehran Conferences of December, 1943, to offer Finland a peace that would preserve its national independence, so Finland was invited to send representatives to Moscow to begin negotiations. On March 25, Paasikivi and former Foreign Minister Carl Enckell left for the Kremlin.⁶⁰ When they arrived, they were given the basis of the peace which Stalin had earlier outlined to Churchill and Roosevelt. It included: (1) internment or expulsion of the German troops in Finland by the end of

⁵⁸Mannerheim, 471.

⁵⁹Ibid., 472.

⁶⁰Ibid., 473.

April, (2) restoration of the 1940 borders, (3) exchange of prisoners, (4) demobilization of the Finnish army, (5) payment of a war reparation of six-hundred million American dollars over a period of five years, and (6) the return of Pechenga to the Soviet Union in exchange for the Russian relinquishment of it's lease on Hanko.⁶¹

The negotiation team returned to Helsinki on April 1, and reported the peace proposals to the Diet. Finland was still not capable of interning or expelling the German army, especially by the end of April. The war reparation demanded by the Soviet Union was far more than the Finns felt they were capable of paying. Instead of serving as a basis of peace, the demand brought only memories of the post-Winter War years. On April 18, the Russian proposals were rejected, and Deputy Foreign Minister Vishinsky warned the Finnish Government that it would have to bear the responsibility for whatever followed.⁶²

In April, General Heinrichs was invited to the Fuehrer Headquarters at Berchtesgaden by General Keitel. At the meeting, both General Keitel and General Jodl expressed their dissatisfaction with the Finnish cooperation. General Jodl said that Finland would have to make a declaration that

⁶¹Herbert Feis, Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 268-269.

⁶²Mannerheim, 473-474.

German military equipment would not fall into the hands of the Russians. Mannerheim did attempt to fulfill the German demand in a letter, but Hitler refused it saying that it was too cautious. The arms shipments to Finland were not continued, but it was stated that Finnish requests would be considered on an individual basis. To increase the pressure on Finland, grain shipments were also halted.⁶³

The quiet that had been maintained on the Finnish fronts was broken on June 9. On that day the Soviet army began a massive assault on the western base of the Karelian Isthmus. The attack, supported by three-hundred artillery pieces for every half mile of the front, pushed the Finnish defenders back six miles in just a few hours. The Finns were forced to retreat north to their second line of defense. Finland had organized three separate lines of defense on the isthmus: one at the base, a few miles north at the point where the isthmus began to widen, and the third was emplaced just north of Viipuri. Mannerheim realized that it would be futile to try to hold between the first and second lines, so he had his men move back behind the new defensive position and brought down replacements from the Viipuri sector. He also asked for and received an immediate continuation of the shipment of arms and grain.⁶⁴

⁶³Mannerheim, 474-475; and Ziemke, 275.

⁶⁴Ibid., 477-478.

The Marshal was also forced to evacuate his troops from Soviet Karelia on June 15. When General Heinrichs communicated this news to General Dietel, the commander of the Twentieth Mountain Corps was not angered by the withdrawal; in fact, he had been worried that the Finns might have tried to hold the position until an effective retreat would have been impossible. Now the Finns could shorten their lines in a stronger defensive position northeast of Lake Ladoga and protect the southern flank of the German forces.⁶⁵

While the Finns were still completing their retreat from the Svir, the Russians broke through Finland's second line of defense on the Karelian Isthmus. Now it was a question of whether the Finns could regroup their forces in time to make a stand behind Viipuri, where they had made such a prolonged defense against the Russians in the Winter War. There was, however, little cause for optimism: The Russians were in complete command of most of the isthmus and now outnumbered the Finns by two to one.⁶⁶

The military crisis on the Karelian Isthmus produced a corresponding political crisis in Helsinki. Finland needed additional arms to check the Russian offensive, and it was forced to draw closer to an alliance with Germany in order

⁶⁵Mannerheim, 478; and Ziemke, 280-281.

⁶⁶Mannerheim, 479-480.

to get them. On June 18, General Heinrichs requested that six German divisions be sent to Finland to cover the Finnish troops while they moved from the Svir to the Karelian Isthmus. Germany did send the 122nd Infantry Division and air units from the Fifth Air Force, but Mannerheim had to promise Hitler that Finland was ready to establish closer ties with Germany to get this aid.⁶⁷

Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop arrived in Finland on June 22 to extract a promise from President Ryti that neither he nor any member of his government would negotiate a separate peace with the Soviet Union. While Ribbentrop was still in Helsinki, the Soviet Union communicated to the Finnish Foreign Ministry through Stockholm that Finland would have to capitulate before a peace could be made. The Soviets indicated that since they had made previous peace offers they no longer trusted Finland to enter into honest negotiations. This left Finland with signing an unconditional surrender with Russia, or signing the agreement with Germany and try to continue the war until Russia offered better terms. Neither choice appealed to the Finns, but they once again turned to the Germans rather than the Russians. On June 26, Ribbentrop

⁶⁷Ziemke, 281-282. Mannerheim completely ignores this. He mentions only that he requested a few planes from General Erfurth of the German High Command. He does mention that this led to Ribbentrop's subsequent visit to Helsinki, but he does not explain his own part in bringing the German Foreign Minister to Finland.

threatened that all aid would cease unless the agreement were signed. President Ryti relented, and he issued a letter stating that neither he, nor anyone appointed by him, would sign a peace treaty not approved by Germany.⁶⁸

The value of Ribbentrop's diplomatic coup was doubtful. If Finland did decide to sign a separate peace, Germany could not possibly hope to make the agreement stand by threatening to withhold arms because the Finns would no longer have any need for them. The only positive result of the treaty as far as Germany was concerned was that Finland had not been branded as an ally of the Reich. One week after Ryti's letter was delivered to Hitler, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Finland, but it did not declare war.⁶⁹

The Finns had had only one object in mind when they signed the agreement with Germany -- arms to stop the Soviet offensive. Arms were delivered to Finland, but not in the amount promised by Ribbentrop. Mannerheim, however, believed that the addition of the one German division plus the new anti-tank weapons would stabilize the front until more favorable peace conditions could be won from the Soviet Union.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Mannerheim, 481-483.

⁶⁹United States Foreign Relations, 1944, III, 606-607.

⁷⁰Mannerheim, 483.

The situation on the German eastern front continued to grow worse. Army Group Center was pushed back into Poland, and by mid-July it looked as if Army Group North would have to retreat behind the Dvina River. Hitler ordered his troops to hold at all cost; a retreat now would cause Hitler to lose complete control of the eastern Baltic.⁷¹

The fact that the Allies had invaded France in June gave some relief to the Finns. Marshal Mannerheim noted that the Russians were beginning to withdraw many of its troops from the Karelian Isthmus in order to concentrate on driving the Germans from the Baltic States. Mannerheim attributed the change in tactics on the Russian's desire to beat the Allies to Berlin.⁷²

Either way the Soviet Union directed its attack, Finland was ultimately going to be the loser. If the attack on the Karelian Isthmus continued, Finland could not hope to hold out for long. If the Russians continued to attack Army Group North in the Baltic States, Finland would soon lose its only supply line and become isolated from German protection and supplies except for the troops of the Twentieth Mountain Army in the north.

The time had now come for Finland to make a decision. It had long been tired of the war and continued to fight only

⁷¹Ziemke, 286-287.

⁷²Mannerheim, 484-485.

because it hoped to extract more favorable peace terms from the Soviet Union. Germany had treated Finland expediently, and since the German army now seemed to be losing its last footholds in Eastern Europe, there was no need to continue the war to honor the "brotherhood in arms" with the Nazis.

As a first step to ending Finland's participation in the war, President Ryti resigned on July 28, and urged Marshal Mannerheim to accept the Presidency. Ryti's position as head of state had been seriously compromised by the agreement Ribbentrop had forced him to sign. He felt that the Russians, who were already suspicious of the Finns' intentions to negotiate, would never begin talks with a government headed by a man who was committed to continue the war. On August 1, Ryti submitted his resignation, and on the 4th the Diet unanimously passed a bill elevating Mannerheim to the presidency without the formal consent of the College of Electors.⁷³

Ryti's resignation and Mannerheim's election came as a surprise to the Germans. For them it was difficult to predict the course that the new president would take. Mannerheim was persona non grata in Moscow, and he was also the symbol of Finland's military establishment. The Marshal, however, was a realist in political affairs, and it had been he who had suggested that Finland get out of the Winter War. In

⁷³Mannerheim, 491-492.

order to encourage Finland to remain in the war, General Keitel and General Schoerner, who had replaced Model as commander of Army Group North, were sent to Helsinki to promise renewed support.⁷⁴

Army Group North was now in a very precarious position as the Russians still threatened to surround it in the Baltic. Mannerheim welcomed the news that the Germans would continue to hold. He was not glad because it would give him a chance to continue the war, but because Finland would have a chance to conclude peace before it was completely isolated. Mannerheim was very frank with General Keitel. He told him that Ryti's resignation had nullified the Ryti-Ribbentrop agreement, and Finland no longer honored the commitment to ask Germany's permission before a separate peace was concluded.⁷⁵

Later in August, the Swedish Government promised Mannerheim that Sweden would supply Finland with foodstuffs for a period of six months. Now that Finland was assured that it no longer had to depend on Germany for these supplies, it began to try to establish negotiations with Russia. On August 25, through its embassy in Stockholm, Finland asked if Moscow would receive negotiators. The next day the Finns were informed that Russia was ready to negotiate for peace

⁷⁴Mannerheim, 492; and Ziemke, 288.

⁷⁵Mannerheim, 493.

if Finland would immediately cease all contact with Germany and see that the German troops withdrew from their country by no later than September 15. The Soviet terms were accepted by Finland's Diet on September 2, and on the same day, diplomatic relations were broken with Germany and the German commander in Finland was informed that his troops must evacuate at once. Marshal Mannerheim drafted a letter to Hitler explaining Finland's new intentions.

In this hour of hard decisions I am compelled to inform you that I have arrived at the conviction that the salvation of my nation makes it my duty to find a means to end the war.

.....

I wish especially to emphasize that Germany will live on even if fate should not crown your arms with victory. Nobody could give such an assurance regarding Finland. If that nation of barely four millions be militarily defeated, there can be little doubt that it will be driven into exile or exterminated. I cannot expose my people to such a fate.

.....

I regard it as my duty to lead my people out of the war. The arms which you have so generously given us I will never of my own accord turn against Germans. I cherish the hope that, even though you may take exception to my letter, you will share the wish of all Finns, that the change in our relations may not give rise to animosity.⁷⁶

Again the Germans were surprised: they had continued to hope and believe that Finland would never accept the punitive Soviet terms. There was some discussion in Germany of trying

⁷⁶Mannerheim, 493-495.

to replace Mannerheim with a pro-German government and organizing resistance movements among the pro-Nazi segments of the population. These suggestions bore more frustration than logic. Mannerheim had complete control of his forces, and the Finnish people supported the move toward peace.⁷⁷

Mannerheim continued contact with the Soviet Union by negotiating a cease fire with Stalin on September 4. The Finnish Peace Delegation arrived in Moscow on September 7, and the terms that were presented to them were similar to the ones that Stalin had outlined earlier to Churchill. The war reparations had been cut in half, but the Soviet Union now demanded the right to use Finnish airfields, ports, and Merchant Marine for the duration of the war. On September 19, the Diet gave its approval to the terms, and the Continuation War had come to an end.⁷⁸

Finland had technically ended its participation in the war, but it still had to cope with the article of the peace treaty which stipulated that German troops were to be removed from the country in two weeks. Finland had no desire to face the 200,000 German troops in the north under hostile conditions. The Finns hoped that Germany would recognize the futility of trying to maintain its present positions in Finland and begin a peaceful retreat. Germany was not in a

⁷⁷Ziemke, 289-290.

⁷⁸Mannerheim, 497-501.

position to maintain its present line of battle, but it did desire to hold and secure whatever positions it felt were necessary to maintain its interests in Norway and the Baltic.

The German High Command had long ago made preparations for a withdrawal from Finland. In February of 1944, Operations Tanne and Birke were designed to remove German troops from southern and northern Finland and protect positions that the Reich believed vital to its war aims. Operation Tanne West would attempt to occupy the Aaland Islands, while Tanne Ost was to take the island of Suursaari in the Gulf of Finland. Operation Birke provided for the withdrawal of the Twentieth Mountain Army and the establishment of defensive positions near Pechanga.⁷⁹

Operation Tanne West and Ost proved to be impossible to begin in September. Sweden had considerable interest in the Aaland Islands, and OKH felt that the Swedes might cut off Germany's supply of iron ore if they were taken. On September 3, Hitler cancelled Tanne West when he learned that the division in Denmark which was responsible for the operation could not be spared. Tanne Ost was similarly cancelled when it was found that only untrained troops were available for the assault on Suursaari.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Warlimont, 418; and Ziemke, 226-228.

⁸⁰Ibid., 472; and Ibid., 292.

The Twentieth Mountain Army did begin Operation Birke on September 6. The operational plans had not been divulged to the Finns, and Germany hoped to establish defensive positions before either the Finnish or the Russian army could offer pursuit. The Finnish Government had told the German army that it believed that Russia would respect the 1941 borders; Germany, however, decided to conduct the retreat as if it were being undertaken on enemy rather than friendly or neutral territory.⁸¹

The XXVI Mountain Corps, which had not yet had time to withdraw from its position between Salla and Kandalaksha, was surprised by Russian armored units on September 7. The Mountain Corps began its retreat on the 9th, and the Russians halted their pursuit at Salla as the German forces drew back west of the 1940 Finnish border. The rest of the retreat from Finland went more smoothly on the west coast. The evacuation from the Finnish ports on the Baltic Sea began on September 6 and in one week all military personnel had been removed from southern Finland.⁸²

The first open hostilities between Germany and Finland came during the second week of the evacuation. The German High Command had begun to change its mind on Operation Tanne Ost when the Finnish commander on Suursaari said that he

⁸¹Ziemke, 293.

⁸²Ibid., 294-295.

would never fire on German troops. Admiral Doenitz, who had been in charge of the German navy since 1943, placed great importance on the island. He felt that if the island could be occupied, Germany could continue to block the Soviet Baltic Fleet's entrance to its naval base at Kronstadt. Therefore, he proposed that Tanne Ost be set into motion by September 15. Troops were assembled at Reval and a landing was attempted on the 15th. Contrary to the light resistance that had been expected, the Finns opened fire on the German troops as they came out of their landing craft, and the Russians contributed heavy air strikes. The Nazis were forced to rescue as many men as possible and return across the Gulf of Finland to Reval.⁸³

Finland did not regard the Suursaari episode as a provocation to begin open warfare against the Germans. In fact, the German attack was fortunate in that it gave the Finns a chance to prove that it was serious in its attempt to remove the German forces from their homeland. The German army finally made an agreement with Finland that would facilitate their withdrawal into Norway. The Finns would offer pursuit in order to make Russia believe that they were pressing the Germans, but they would allow the German forces to destroy bridges and roads in order to give themselves an excuse for never actually catching up with the retreating army. The

⁸³Mannerheim, 498-499; and Ziemke, 296.

Finns, however, warned the Germans that they were determined to have peace, and they would have to continue to try, in part, to accept all Soviet demands.⁸⁴

On September 28, the Russians told Finland that they were ready to "assist" the Finns if they were having trouble with the German troops. The threat of Soviet intervention produced more hostilities, as the Finns now ordered the Germans to hurry their retreat. On October 2, the German forces were ordered to operate "without restraint" against the Finns. Now, the Finns were fired upon, hostages were taken, and a path of total destruction was laid behind the path of retreat. By October 8, the German troops had turned north at Rovaniemi and were beginning to head toward Norway.⁸⁵

OKW, in early October, began to plan an extension of Operation Birke. It was now decided that the Finnish nickel was no longer needed. Now, instead of forming defensive positions about the nickel fields of northeastern Finland, the Twentieth Mountain Army was to withdraw to the so-called Lyngen Position. A short line between the Lyngen Fjord in Norway and the northern tip of Sweden. Here, the Germans hoped to continue to control the northern Norwegian coast against any Allied attack.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Ziemke, 297.

⁸⁵Mannerheim, 504-505.

⁸⁶Ziemke, 300.

By December, the Nazis controlled only a few square miles of Finnish territory along the northwest border. This position was held until the Germans' surrender in April, 1945, but, although this small foothold in Finland was retained, German influence in Finland had been completely ended.⁸⁷

⁸⁷Ziemke, 301-311, passim.

CONCLUSION

The course of Nazi Germany's diplomatic history with Finland is a classic example of the Reich's political expedience. The German people and even many of the Nazi leaders had a large store of sympathy for Finland's struggle to remain outside the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, but this concern for Finland's plight was subordinated to the Reich's concern for its own welfare.

Finland has unfortunately been branded by some as a willing Nazi ally. This is definitely not the case. Finland, because of its geographical location in the Baltic, was caught at the apex of a political triangle which also included the Soviet Union and Germany. Russia had long been a menace to the tenuous security of the Finnish people, first, when Finland Russia moved west to fight Sweden five-hundred years ago, and then when the Soviet Union tried to use Finland as a buffer zone against German aggression in two world wars. A tiny country of only a little over three and a half million people, Finland has never been able to gain a complete control over its own destiny. It has only been able to survive by allying itself with stronger nations and by bending to the realities of European politics.

Finland's decision to side with Germany in its war against the Soviet Union was not really a matter of choice.

It was the only alternative left to the country once it had been deserted by Sweden and isolated from Great Britain and France by Hitler's conquest of Norway in 1940. Neither the Soviet Union nor Germany would have allowed Finland to remain out of the war. Russia had long indicated that its troops would move into Finland if a war with Germany began. Hitler had included Finland as a possible ally against Russia long before he asked the Finns for their support. Finland, then, had only three courses of action before it: (1) remain neutral and see its lands turned into a Russo-German battlefield, (2) ally itself with the Soviet Union and face a future program of Russification, or (3) ally itself with Germany and try to eliminate the Soviet menace once and for all. Given the facts that Finland was isolated from the Western Allies, it considered Russia as its mortal enemy, and Germany seemed to have an undisputed control over Europe, it is not difficult to understand why Finland chose to collaborate with the Nazis.

Had Finland not bordered on the Soviet Union, it may have been able to escape the war by remaining neutral as Sweden did. Had it been located on the North Atlantic, it would undoubtedly have tried to align itself with the Western Allies. The principles of democracy ran deep in Finland, and there was little love for or desire to cooperate with the Nazis even after it was forced into the war on Germany's side.

One cannot blame a nation for trying to save its

independence. During the war years, many nations found themselves compromising their principles in order to escape totalitarian domination. Great Britain did not relish its alliance with the Soviet Union, nor did Hungary wish to join the Nazi camp. These were decisions which had to be made in order to survive in an era of Realpolitik.

Hitler used Finland for his own ends. There can be little doubt of this. By placing Finland within the Soviet sphere of influence in 1939, the Fuehrer was temporarily appeasing Russia at Finland's expense. It was only in 1940, when Hitler's attention was turned once again to the East, that Germany considered friendly relations with Finland.

Germany was interested in Finland primarily as a second front against the Soviet Union. It had been interested in the Finnish nickel, but this was a secondary matter compared to the strategic geographic location of Finland. The interest in the nickel was important only because Germany was experiencing wartime shortages; the Reich had no intention of conquering the country to control that metal. Hitler also did not have any plan to include Finland as a part of the German Lebensraum. Indeed, he even believed that Finland's swamps and rugged Arctic winters made the country unsuitable for the German way of life. The Fuehrer talked vaguely of expanding Finland's borders to the east and the south, but this stemmed from a desire to create a strong ally in the north rather than from any great love of the Finnish people.

Before 1940, Hitler looked upon Finland as being expendable. After 1940, he looked to Finland only as a means by which he could expedite his campaign against the Soviet Union. To the Fuehrer, Finland was simply a piece of real estate to be bartered or retained, depending on the current needs of the Reich.

Finland also tried to use Germany as expediently as possible, and it succeeded to a certain extent. Finland's war aims were limited and completely contingent upon the Nazis' ability to win a decisive victory over the Soviet Union. Finland wanted to cooperate with Germany only in so far as that cooperation would be of assistance to itself. This was illustrated on numerous occasions, much to the dismay of the German army. When Hitler's attack into Russia began to stall, he began to look for additional assistance from Finland. When Leningrad refused to fall, the Germans requested that Finland extend its war aims and continue its offensive to the south. The desired cooperation never materialized, because Finland realized that Germany had overextended itself and it could no longer achieve a decisive victory over Russia. When the Germans began their retreat from Russia, Finland began an equally proportionate withdrawal of its support to the Reich.

The Nazi campaign to dominate Europe brought out the best and the worst in many nations. Hitler's strategy forced many countries to revert to an almost primeval survival of

the fittest diplomacy. For the nations that shared a common border with Russia, the struggle for national existence was doubly complicated. These nations found themselves caught between two super powers which showed little concern for the rights of other countries in their own quest for expansion and national security. The diplomatic maneuvering and then the military struggle between Finland, Germany, and the Soviet Union was just another chapter in the story of Hitler's attempt to conquer Europe.

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There are few primary sources which deal with Nazi Germany's relationship with Finland. Most of the major sources in English are written from a Finnish perspective; German sources treat the collaboration as a secondary matter. Documents on German Foreign Policy has proved to be the most

valuable point of reference. It clearly shows the expedient diplomacy which Germany used to try to appease Russia and then cautiously bring Finland into cooperation with the Reich. Unfortunately, the series does not continue past the invasion of Russia, and it does not go into the details of the military plans between Germany and Finland. Marshal Mannerheim's Memoirs offers a good chronological sequence to the relationship between Germany and Finland, but the book cannot be entirely trusted to give accurate details. Mannerheim has tried to obscure the events of the pre-Continuation War military planning, and other sources must be checked in order to verify his statements. The Winter War by Väino Tanner is an excellent study of the events that preceded the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-1940. It portrays the desperate situation that Finland found itself in once Germany had agreed to give the Baltic States to Russia. However, Germany plays a secondary role in the work. The very limited testimony of Nazi officers in Trials of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal does give additional information on the Finno-German military conferences of 1940-1941. Nazi-Soviet Relations contains the best portrayal of the position that Finland played in the relationship between Germany and the USSR. The Fuehrer Conferences and the Halder Diaries both add random, but important, information on Hitler's attitude toward Finland. The other works give only depth and dimension to the sources already cited.

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There are no secondary sources in English which deal exclusively with Finno-German relations. Earl Ziemke's The German Northern Theater of Operations is the most complete treatment of German military activities in Finland. It is a well-researched volume, and the author has used many Finnish and German sources which have not been translated into English. It is a thorough and highly-objective study of military matters, but it contains only a passing reference to the diplomatic activities. Finland in Crisis and Finland in the Second World War are both well-documented studies of the Finnish diplomacy of the period. Upton's book contains many interesting interpretations of questions concerning Finno-German relations which can not be authenticated by documentation. Charles Lundin's work has a very valuable chapter which evaluates the primary and secondary sources on the subject of Nazi-Finnish collaboration. Finland's economic dilemma in the early war years is well portrayed in Medlicott's Economic Blockade. The remainder of the sources are all helpful, but they treat Finno-German relations as a secondary issue.